

THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE



E·F·BENSON

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And in the West, whither she was journeying, there was still the
afterglow of sunset. Chapter XI.

The House of Defence

By
Edward Frederick
E. F. BENSON

Author of

"The Image in the Sand,"

"Dodo," "Scarlet and Hyssop,"

"Mammon & Co.," "The Challoners,"

"The Angel of Pain," Etc.

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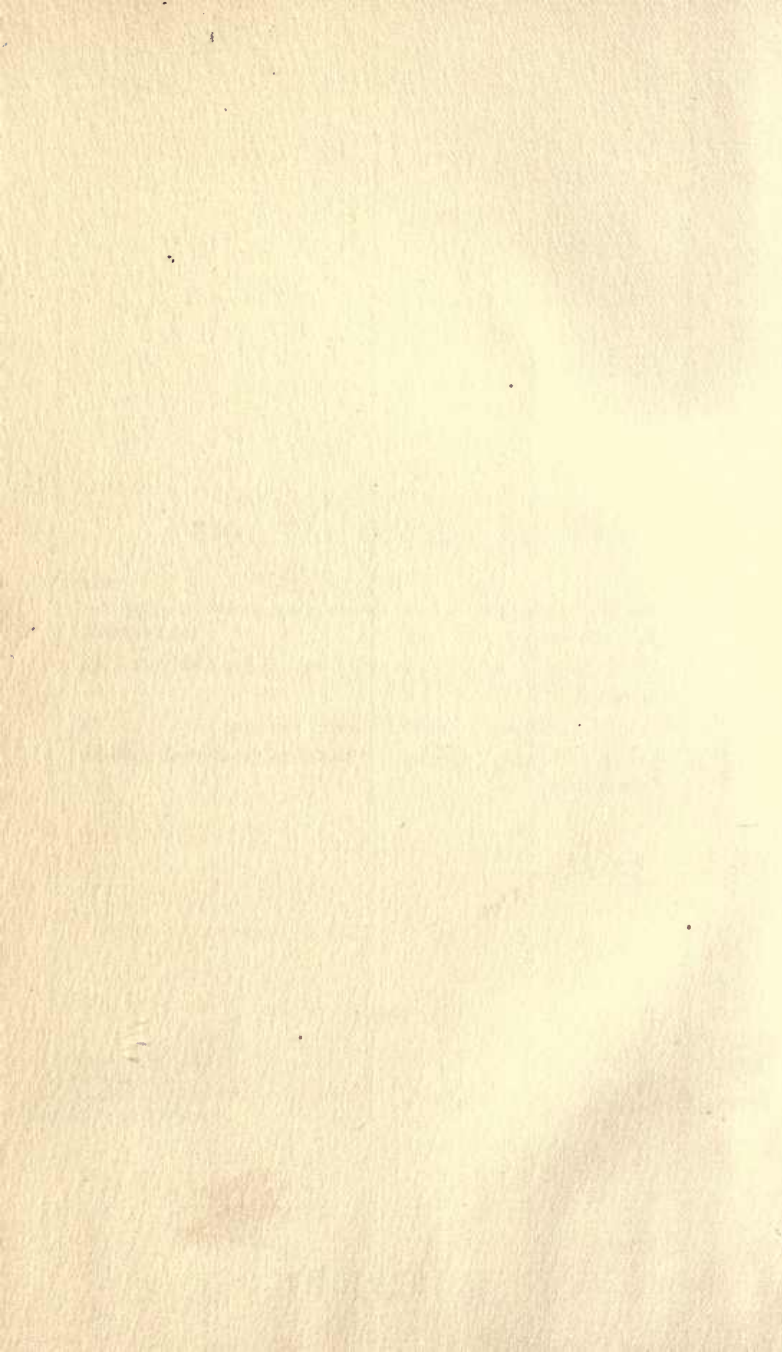
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
"And in the West, whither she was journeying, there was still the afterglow of sunset" - - - - -	<i>frontispiece</i>
"Then, still without looking away from the water she spoke to him again" - - - - -	37
"You are better already, you know, Sandy," he said - -	93
"It is directed to Thurso," she said, "and it is from that chemist in Windsor." - - - - -	172



& help me to hold her, all
off on' he said. It is life or
death, & she has the strength
of three men.

Then followed a couple of minutes
so ghastly, so terrible that none
ever spoke of them afterwards, they
have not until death could erase
them. She has rushed to the door, &
maniac-like, she has flung Jack from
in front of it. It was no time for
gentleness, & none knew that better

Edgar Allan Poe.

THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE

CHAPTER. I

It was already after eight in the evening, but here, in these high latitudes of Caithness, since the time of the year was within a fortnight of midsummer, the sun was still some way above the horizon, and shone full, with the cool brightness of the northern light, into the window on the seat of which Lady Maud Stratton was sitting. Lady Maud was waiting without impatience, for impatience was foreign to her habit of mind, but with a little touch of anxiety, since affection and all the cares that appertain to it were the constant guests of her heart, for her brother's return. The room was of great extent, and looked larger than it really was because of its half-dismantled condition, and the big reflecting surface of its bare parquettèd floor added to its apparent dimensions. In one corner of it was the little table, laid for two, where they would dine when he came in; in another was a writing-desk littered with correspondence, while close by the fireplace was a low easy chair with a basket of needle-

work beside it, which denoted where she herself had been making her nest, before she had strolled across to the window, ten minutes ago, to catch the last half hour of sunlight, and also to catch sight of her brother as he came up the road towards the lodge. Though the season was mid-June, a sparkle of fire, born of a delectable mixture of peat and coal, burned on the hearth, making a pleasant brightness to the eye, and destined after sunset to make a not unpleasant warmth, for nights even now set in with a certain chilliness, and this evening especially, in spite of the blazing glories of the low sun, there was that crystalline clearness in the air which usually led on to frost when its direct rays were withdrawn. For the house stood high and exposed on those gray-purple heathered hills of Caithness, not seeking protection from hollowed and sheltered valley or screen of trees, and the rigors of cold and frost were felt there without abatement.

The table laid for dinner in one corner, a desk littered with correspondence, and a woman's nook near the fireplace, all in the same big room, gave the impression of encampment and of temporary and unexpected habitation, and this was borne out also by the holland sheetings which had not been removed from the big glass chandelier that hung from the middle of the ceiling and still enveloped the larger articles of furniture. All

pointed to a sudden and not abiding stay, as if the occupants of the house were content with the necessities of life and dispensed with its habitual adornments. Such indeed was the case, for Lord Thurso and his sister had arrived here suddenly two evenings ago, preceded by a telegram only to the caretaker to make a room or two no more than habitable, she merely to keep him company and deliver him from the tedium and dejection of solitary evenings after what must be anxious and depressing days. For in the village of Stratton, a mile below the lodge, there had broken out a scourge of typhoid, sudden and virulent, and since the village, like everything else within this wide horizon, was part of Thurso's estate, it had seemed to him, clearly and without question, to be his business to leave town and come up here to see what was possible to stop this pestilence and do what could be done to bring relief to the homes already stricken with it. Lady Thurso, however, though her name and active support were ever at the service of charitable schemes, had not in the least seen her way to accompanying him. If Thurso thought he had better go, why by all means he must do so, but there was clearly no useful end to be served by her going with him. For herself, she did not see what object was to be gained by his going, since he had already telegraphed orders to his agent, a careful, sensible

8 THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE

man, to do all that the doctors wished done, but she was aware that she and Thurso often looked on this sort of question with different eyes, and had no more attempted to dissuade him from going than he had attempted to persuade her to come with him. But it had seemed perfectly clear to Maud that Thurso could not go all by himself, and without in the least criticising either openly or mentally his wife's refusal to go with him, she had merely taken her place. Indeed she had scarcely offered her companionship: she had just joined him at an early dinner before driving to King's Cross to catch the night mail and go north with him.

The state of things which they had found on their arrival seemed to them both to justify his coming. A panic-terror, such as is only possible among ignorant, uneducated folk, who are naturally healthy, and know little of illness and disease, had seized the village at this sudden striking down of the strongest and healthiest among them. Mixed with it, too, was distrust and fear of doctors, arising from that same ignorance, and the inability to believe that it could be right when a man was prostrated by the exhaustion of a mortal weakness produced by the fever to deny him a morsel of meat or a crust of solid food. Doctors were there and nurses, but it was not the medical

attendance, but the obedience to the orders of nurses and doctors, that had been so difficult to enforce. And it was for this purpose that Lord Thurso found at once that he had been right in coming, since a word from him did more than a dozen orders from a doctor. For feudal obedience, in spite of distrust of doctors, was on his side, and now that the laird ranged himself on the side of the doctors, who ordered windows to be opened when all folk of common sense would be inclined to shut every chink and cranny by which the air might enter and give "cold" to the patient, and forbade solid food to be given, though "the puir body was crying out half the nicht for a bit of bread," it was necessary to follow these incomprehensible decrees, since the laird also enjoined them, though many heads were shaken over treatment which seemed obviously unreasonable. Thurso had brought his valet with him, but otherwise the caretaker and his wife looked after the needs of him and his sister. Upstairs there was open just a bedroom for them each, and downstairs this one big room half-shrouded in holland sheeting, where they ate and sat.

Nature had for many generations adopted a very sensible and reasonable plan with regard to the Stratton family. They were extremely prolific, and numbered their cousins by the hun-

dred, and she had certainly said to herself: "There is not enough beauty to go round, so what shall I do about them? Shall I divide up all the beauty which I can invest in each generation between all the children, or shall I mould and paint it all into one of them and let the rest look after themselves?" She had adopted the second alternative, and now for six or seven generations of Strattons there had always been one perfect and exquisite piece of modelling in the successive families, while the others had to be content with a certain air of distinction and pleasantness which, however, made their plainness a matter of small account. Sometimes Nature, one could not help feeling, had made an error of judgment in investing the beauty of some one generation in a boy and not in a girl, but in this generation she had made no such mistake, and here in the window waiting for her brother was the lucky possessor of the natural fortunes of the rest of her family. Like them all, she was tall, and for once in a way expression and charm were not sacrificed, as so often happens to mere perfection of feature. For violet eyes are so often no more than violet eyes, just pieces of beautiful color, but here the thousand moods of the girl's mind that like clouds and alternate sunshine on some windy spring day chased each other across some azure surface, were reflected from the depths of those

violet pools, and through the beautiful windows there looked out a beautiful soul. Humor and an alert sense of the ludicrous, so valuable a weapon in that mental armory with which we have to repel the assaults of adverse and annoying circumstances, were there also, ready to set the mouth smiling; intense and kindly interest in the spectacle of life shone there, and deep down in them you would say that something not yet fully awake slept, and perhaps dreamed, in its twenty years' slumber. And a man might find the breath catch at the thought of awakening that.

Like all the Strattons, she was very fair of complexion, but her hair was not of that vague straw-color which loosely passes for gold, but of that tint touched and illuminated by orange color which made it gleam as if the unminted metal shone in it. It grew low on her forehead and abundantly, but not in those excessive quantities that instantly make the observer think of the ladies who stand all day with their backs to the windows of popular thoroughfares in order to display the riotous excess of capillary covering which the use of some particular dressing for the head unfortunately results in. Nor again was her mouth that perfect "Cupid's bow" which is so dear to the creators of feminine perfection. It was not indeed like a bow at all; it was rather large, and rather full-lipped, but, like her eyes,

or like aspen leaves in spring, it was all a-quiver with response to the mood of the moment. Nor were her lips vermilion, a hue that nature happily does not use on the human mouth, leaving its employment to art, but they were of that veiled blood-tint that speaks of youth and vitality as surely as vermilion speaks only of the desire to appear to be the possessor of these excellent gifts.

Thurso was naturally of extremely impressionable and imaginative mind, and the day, spent as it had been in going from house to house, finding wherever he went the apparatus of illness, or the simpler and grimmer apparatus of death, had been like some real and hideous nightmare to him. Clearly as Maud understood and sympathized with his instinct of coming up here himself, she found herself wondering whether he had been right to come. Then, too, he had tortured himself with a hundred pure suppositions. Was this epidemic in any way his fault, in that he had not had the water-supply more constantly tested? Clearly, if everything, drains, pipes, water and what-not, had been all in perfect order typhoid could not have come. These were his tenants: it was his business to see that the conditions under which they lived were sanitary.

Now Thurso was a perfect working-model (as large as life) of the conscientious landlord, and these suppositions, though they seemed terribly

real and totally unanswerable to him on his way back to the house at this same hour last night, were but morbid creations of his brain, since all his life he had done all he could to insure the healthfulness of those who were dependent on him, and on these morbid creations Maud, with her sweetness and gaiety of spirit, had acted like a charm. She knew well that Thurso had never been neglectful or culpable, and that being certain, she had addressed herself not to combat his doubts and questionings, but to turn his attention resolutely away from them, just as a wise nurse will not try to convince a frightened child that the dark contains no bogeys, by letting the room continue dark and prove by demonstration that no winged and nailed creature is born therefrom, but will rather quiet its fears by bringing a light. And as the nurse does not reason to herself about the best treatment for childish terror, so Maud did not reason to herself about the best treatment for unreasonable scruples. She only said to herself, "Darling old Thurso is dreadfully down. So I'll distract his mind by being dreadfully foolish!"

So foolish she had been, but yet with art, so that it should not occur to him that she was playing the part of nurse, and bringing a light because he was afraid of the dark. And as when David played before Saul to exorcise the evil spirit, so

14 THE HOUSE OF DEFENCE

she had played till he forgot his imaginary troubles in the charm and gaiety which, though she assumed them deliberately, were yet natural to her.

To-night, however, the obsession of his fear and unreasonable dependency had seemed to descend on her, and it needed a strong and conscious effort to dispel it. For this might be unreasonable, too—she knew that at the back of her mind she was anxious about him. Terrible as this epidemic was, it was producing a disproportionate effect on him: he was taking it too hardly, and also too self-consciously. From her intimate knowledge of him, from that blood-instinct also which can enable a sister to know what a brother is feeling, even though a wife does not perceive it, she knew that he was strung up almost to breaking-point. Yet she felt, with a certain secret pride in his courage, that nobody else but she would have guessed that. For from childhood he had always been like that, balanced on an edge, ready to topple over into depths of despondency, but with proper courage he had concealed his precarious balance from the world, turning a brave and equable face to it, even though he wore a mask. But for her he wore none: and she often saw his inward torture when others only saw a pleasant, courteous man, not gay, but with a

certain high-bred, quiet enjoyment of manner which just now is slightly at a discount in the capital of the dominion of the King.

Maud got up from her seat in the window, for the sun had wheeled further north, leaving it in shadow, and closed the sash, still looking down the riband of road which ran in whip-lash curves across the moor to the village, allowing herself again another moment for somewhat sombre contemplation. How inextricably soul and body were mixed and mingled together; how intimately and instantaneously they acted and re-acted on each other! Thurso's anxiety for these people, a purely mental or spiritual feeling, had kept him awake last night, and he had come down this morning with one of those racking neuralgic headaches to which all his life he had been liable. His suffering of mind had made his body suffer, too, and that bodily suffering had reacted again upon his mind and had made the poor old boy so horribly cross. Then, since there was the day's work before him, for the sake of which he had come up here, and in his racking pain he was really incapable of doing it, he had taken the remedy which he had always by him, in case of necessity, but which he disliked taking just as much as Maud disliked his taking it.

But when after breakfast he had said to her,

“ Maud, I simply can’t go down there, and if I did, I couldn’t help in any way unless I cure this,” she had agreed that it was an occasion for laudanum.

She strolled across to the fire and held out her hands to the blaze, which shone through her fingers, making them look as if they were luminous in themselves and lit from within. Then suddenly, with a little dramatic gesture, as if she carried her trouble, a palpable burden, in her hands, she threw it into the fire, and having consigned it to destruction walked back to the window again. Yet she knew in herself that she had not disposed of it, for it went very deep, it was very vital. The sorrow of the world, how to reconcile that with the perfect love that made the world! Indeed, it needed strong hands or an indifferent heart to cast that away. . . . But there at last was a figure on the road, and without putting on her hat she went out to meet him.

She saw at once, before she could clearly see his face, but by a certain age and dejection in his walk, that he was suffering, but here, too, it seemed to her that she could help him better by cheerfulness, however vapid, than by sympathy.

“ Dear old boy,” she called to him before they actually met; “ but have you any idea that it is half-past eight, and I’ve got such a sinking inside, Thurso, that I don’t suppose there was ever such

a sinking known. I vote we don't dress, so we can dine at once. I'm sure dinner is ready, because I distinctly smelled soup and something like roast and baked apples all rolling richly out of the kitchen windows. I nearly burst into tears, because I wanted them all so much. And how has the day gone? "

He stopped. David's first strain had not reached Saul.

" Oh, Maud, it is too awful," he said. " Ten fresh cases to-day. I don't know what to do. And when my head is like this I am perfectly useless. I can't think; I can't face things." Maud took his arm.

" You poor old thing," she said. " Has it been bad all day? "

" No, it was all right in the morning, but it came on again worse than ever after lunch. Well, not exactly after lunch, because I didn't have any, but after lunch-time."

Maud gave a little exclamation of impatience.

" Thurso, you are too bad! " she said. " You know perfectly well that if you go without food too long you always get one of these headaches. And it's no use your saying there wasn't any time for you to have lunch, because lunch takes ten minutes, whereas a headache takes hours. It is foolish of you, because you suffer, and it's wicked

of you, dear, because it makes you of absolutely no use in the world."

He smiled at her; the infection of her energy gave a little life to him.

"Well, I forgot about lunch till the pain came on," he said, "and after that I couldn't eat."

"If that is meant to mean that you are not going to have any dinner either," she said, "you make a mistake. You are going to have soup and meat and roast apples. And if you attempt to deny it, I shall instantly add toasted cheese."

Thurso was silent a moment.

"Ah, those poor, wretched people—" he began. But Mand stopped him, still with art.

"I'm not going to hear one word about them till you have finished dinner," she said. "Afterwards, because you will be better then, we will talk. Don't you remember how, if one wasn't quite well, Nurse always said one would be better after dinner? And one always was. I wonder whether it was dinner or mere suggestion from a higher power that did it."

"Dinner," said he promptly. "Oh, d—n my head!" he added in a sudden burst of tired irritability and pain.

"Yes, with pleasure, if that will help. But I wonder if it was entirely dinner. You know there is something in suggestion, though I prefer supplementing suggestion with something practical

as well. Who are those people who are always quite well because they believe they are? ”

“ I should think they are fools,” he remarked.

“ By the way——”

“ Well? ”

“ No, nothing,” he said.

Maud withdrew her arm from his with dignity.

“ That is extremely ill-bred,” she said. “ Mind, I don’t want to know what you were going to say, but having begun you ought, with decent manners, to go on.”

Thurso laughed.

“ You do want to know? ” he said.

“ Well, yes, I do. Please tell me.”

“ I shan’t. Maud, I think I had better change, as I have been in and out of those houses all day. But you needn’t.”

Maud was slightly ruffled.

“ That is kind of you,” she said.

Thurso went upstairs accordingly, while Maud waited for him below. There was indeed no mystery or reason for secrecy in that which he had stopped himself telling her; merely he was not quite sure whether he wanted to do that which he had been on the point of proposing, which in itself was of an absolutely simple and unexciting nature. The bare dull facts indeed were these: He had let the salmon fishing of the river here

until the end of July to an American, whose name this moment he could not remember, and this afternoon as he came out of one of the cottages he had passed one of his own gillies walking with a young man, of clearly Transatlantic origin, who he felt sure must be the American in question. The remark then that he had not made to Maud was that it might be neighborly to invite him to dinner. But as he made his hurried toilet, so as not to keep his sister waiting, he found himself debating the pros and cons of this with a perfectly unwarrantable earnestness, as if the decision, this way or that, was one that could conceivably be of importance. On the one side the reasons against asking him were that the hospitality that he could offer was of the very roughest and most plain-cook kind, and that his tenant would probably get a much better dinner at the inn where he was staying; also he had a feeling that if he himself had come up to Scotland to fish he would much rather not be asked out to dinner by his landlord, since such hospitality, if accepted, would mean a curtailment of the cream of the evening rise. So, perhaps, the truer hospitality would be not to burden his tenant with the necessity to make excuses. Then suddenly his name, Walter Cochran, flashed into his mind. In any case, he concluded, it would be kinder not to ask

Mr. Walter Cochran to come three miles in order to eat Scotch broth with a tired landlord.

But, on the other hand, he felt a perfectly unaccountable desire to see him. He had just met and passed him in the village street, after coming out from one of those cottages where a strong young stalker of his was lying, it was feared, at the point of death. He himself, too, was racked with this hideous unnerving pain, and at the moment he was feeling utterly dispirited and beaten and hopeless. Their eyes—his and Mr. Cochran's—had met for a moment, and just for that moment, by chance no doubt, or perhaps by that subtle intuition which some people possess, Thurso had felt suddenly soothed and quieted. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the other. He was rather tall, young, clean-shaven, with a pleasant boyish face, which had something of the prairie and the open-air about it. Yet at that moment Thurso had felt almost irresistibly inclined to speak to him and thank him, to tell him how his head ached and how miserable and dispirited he felt, to tell him also that he had made him feel better for the moment. That impulse had been quite ridiculously strong, but in another second they had passed each other going their respective ways. Yet all afternoon, subsequent to that chance encounter, the remembrance of Mr. Cochran strolling down to the river, talk-

ing in a pleasant, friendly manner to the gillie, had never been entirely out of his mind—he had seemed so extraordinarily healthy and content, and just now poor Thurso had an immense envy of such gifts.

He finished dressing without any severe return of pain, but just as he was preparing to go downstairs, dismissing Mr. Cochran from his mind, it came on again in sudden stabs and flashes of anguish, so that for a moment he held on with clenched hands and bitten lips to his table, feeling that he must grip hold of something. At the moment his eye fell on the bottle of laudanum which stood by the looking-glass, and though never before had he taken two doses on the same day, yet never before had the pain been so agonizing and so persistent, and next moment he had poured a full dose into his graduated glass and drank it. But the beads of perspiration from the pain were standing on his forehead, he felt faint and sick with it, and sat down for a moment to wait for the blessed relief that would so soon come. On his very sensitive and excitable nerves the drug exercised an almost instantaneous effect, not soporific at all, but tranquillizing, and at the same time stimulating. The pain faded like the melting away of the vapor of breath on a frosty morning, and as it faded a warm, tingling glow began to invade him. It was as if on some bitter, biting

Arctic night the sun of the south poured its warm, bracing rays on to his brain; happiness and content were unfolded like a map, the new-born sense of well-being stretched and sunned itself in this luminous peace.

He had not to wait long. Before the seconds had ticked themselves into a minute this divine remission of pain began, and, with it, the no-less blessed glow of content; and a couple of minutes afterwards it was not so much in the utter relief of pain that his body revelled as in the ecstatic sense of supreme bodily harmony. And then, as always, this well-being of the body spread, like some warm, incoming tide, to his mind, the one reacting on the other. The horror and suffering of his poor fever-stricken village ceased to weigh upon him and darken the soul with its anguish and his own helplessness. Instinctively his mind ceased to dwell on the thought of the bedside of the stalker whose life was despaired of, but went to another bedside where a life that had almost been despaired of yesterday was coming back from the entrance to the valley of the shadow, and had crawled out to-day from the thorn-hedge of illness, so to speak, on to the high-road of recovery. This case was that of a woman—the wife of Duncan Frazer, one of his fishing-gillies. And in this spirit he looked hopefully forward, while the soothing, stimulating drug made its beneficent

way within him, to further amelioration to-morrow.

Thurso had sat down for a moment to recover from the faintness that had seized him at that sudden onslaught of pain, but also in order to abandon himself more entirely to the raptures of these drug-effects. Then, after a few minutes, he got up, remembering two things, the first that he was keeping Maud waiting, the second that for the first time he was consciously revelling and delighting in the bodily sensation that the opium produced. Up till to-day he had taken it purely medicinally, in order to relieve pain when the pain was intolerable or paralyzing to exertions that he was called upon to make, and having taken it like a medicine he had done no more than take the medicinal advantage of its restoring qualities. But to-night he knew deep down in himself that he had done something different, had taken it in a different spirit. True, the pain had been very acute, but as he drank he knew that he had welcomed and waited for not only the remission of pain and the return of energy, but for that glow of seeming exquisite health and harmony of sensation that it gave him. Yet though he no longer, as he got up, abandoned himself to this, he was vividly conscious that he had done so. And as he went downstairs a third thought, laudanum-born,

occurred to him. He must not let Maud know he had taken it again; he must not let her see how suddenly and completely the pain had gone, for fear that she might guess. Already he was slightly ashamed of what amounted to cowardice, yet . . . yet he felt so brilliantly well that it was impossible to be ashamed of anything. But if she asked? Well, in that case it would be better to "put the question by." She had no business to ask; whether he had taken laudanum again or not was his affair. Perhaps—yes, that was the right plan. He would be silent and quiet till dinner was nearly over, and then confess that dinner had done him good. She had told him that it would, and indeed the pain often left him as suddenly as it came on, as if a tap had been turned on or off.

All this flashed instantaneously through his head. Another thought flashed there too. There was Paradise in that little bottle; whether one was in pain or not there was Paradise there. He felt he would willingly endure tortures, if at the end he could push open those golden gates again. Pain was nothing compared to these pleasures. Surely now and then a half-hour in Paradise could not hurt him. He was perfectly willing to pass through hours of hell in between.

Soup had already arrived when he came downstairs, and, according to his plan, he said little till

he had eaten a couple of courses. Indeed, his first speech was to demand more of the "something roast," and Maud had given him an approving nod. He finished his second helping, and leaned back in his chair.

"I don't like telling you that you are right," he said, "but honesty compels me to. Dinner, or suggestion, or both, have certainly done the trick. They've turned off the tap. Quite, quite off. It doesn't even drip. I will even allow it was suggestion, if you like, because I am so pleased that I will allow anything."

"Oh, Thurso, I'm so glad!" she said. "And I so often wish I could take it for you."

"You wouldn't like it when you got it," said he, rather grimly.

"No, but I should like to take it. I could bear lots of pain if I knew it was otherwise somebody else's. But it must be so difficult if it is only your own. And now you may tell me about to-day. Oh, how wise I was not to let you talk about it before. I'm sure you were taking a neuralgic view. Apple?"

"Yes, two, please. I was. I was thinking only of poor Sandy, who I am afraid is dying, and not of Duncan Frazer's wife, who appears to be better. Headache made me forget that. But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. It's this, Maud."

He paused a moment.

“ I know you will feel with me about it,” he said, “ though I daresay Lily will make a fuss when she knows. I think I must turn this house into a hospital for them. You see, if one case appears in one of the cottages, think what happens! There are three, or at the most four, rooms in them, and the whole of the rest of the family has to live in two, or at the most three, rooms. The sick-room, too; twelve feet by ten! Dr. Symes agrees with me. Look at the big dining-room here. It will hold a dozen beds, and lots of air for them all. Also, up here one nurse can easily look after twice the number of patients she can manage if she has to trot about from house to house. So I have given orders. Any case Dr. Symes thinks he can safely move will be moved up here, and so will all fresh cases. Of course, you will have to go back to town.”

Maud laughed.

“ And you?” she asked.

“ I shall stop here. I can’t leave while things are like this.”

“ Oh, Thurso,” she said, “ you mar the excellent effect of your speeches by talking dreadful nonsense at the end. It’s an admirable idea moving them up here, so admirable that I am surprised I didn’t think of it first. But as for my going back to town. You silly old thing!”

“ But, Maud——”

“ There isn’t any ‘ but, Maud.’ ”

“ But I can’t and won’t have you in the house with forty or fifty cases of typhoid here,” said he.

“ Then turn me out into the cold, bleak night. I came up here to keep you company, and shall continue to do so. So shut up! To begin with, there is no risk of infection, and, to go on with, I shouldn’t catch it if there was.”

“ Why not? ”

Maud grew momentarily grave.

“ Why, because I always mean to get through the day’s work, and I couldn’t if I propose to go to bed with typhoid. Oh, yes, when one has clearly got one’s work to do, one is allowed to go and do it. Now, I’ll play you at picquet.”

CHAPTER II

MAUD had happened to come across, in a book she was reading on her way up to Scotland, an account of a typhoid epidemic in which the charitable lady of the piece sat by the bedsides of the patients and fed them with "cooling fruits." She did not at the time know anything whatever about the treatment or nursing of typhoid, but on arrival it had occurred to her to ask their doctor if she could make herself of any use in these lines, and the excellent Dr. Symes had laughed immoderately.

"You will soon stop the epidemic if you do," he said, "because everybody you feed with cooling fruit will certainly die. No, you can't help us down in the village, but you have your work up at the house, keeping Lord Thurso from moping in the evening and making himself miserable. I am very glad you came with him. But all day you can amuse yourself. If I were you I should be out of doors all I could. It tends to tranquillity."

This advice came into her head the next morning after Thurso had gone down to the village, and it was counsel which she could easily put into

practice, since, according to her view of the universe, the world (especially the world out-of-doors) was full of delightful occupations and pursuits, than which there was none more entrancing than catching sea-trout with a light rod and light tackle. And since the river Rogan, which ran its short and delectable course not half a mile from the lodge, was one of the finest sea-trout streams in the country, it was not difficult to follow the doctor's advice and amuse herself. She knew nothing, of course, of the fact that Thurso had let the fishing to the American whom he had met yesterday in the street, and he had decided not to ask to dinner.

Thurso did not intend to come back home for lunch to-day, and as the house would be full of workmen busy shifting furniture and making the rooms ready, under the superintendence of one of the doctors, for the typhoid patients, Maud went off to the river without saying a word to anybody, with a light and exultant heart. Sandy, poor fellow, her special fishing gillie, was down with typhoid and desperately ill, and in this hay-making month all those who in the autumn were stalkers or gillies were busy with their crofts, so she went alone with sandwich, rod and landing-net to spend an enchanted day.

Maud had in an extraordinary degree that *joie-de-vivre* which gilded any employment on which

she was engaged, and indeed to go fishing for sea-trout needed no gilding—it was golden to her mind already. For hours one might cast one's fly upon the waters, and though catching nothing never lose the confident anticipation that one was just going to; at any moment the swirl of submerged strength and activity would bend one's rod to that glorious course that the fisherman knows to be the true and correct attack. Like everything else that anybody finds to be worth doing (except keeping accounts), mystery and romance enveloped and illuminated the pursuit for her, and as she walked down to the river Thurso's headache, the typhoid, all she was missing by not being in London, were sponged off from her mind. True, dreadful things might be in store for her by the stream; to fish with a big sea-trout fly might easily attract the attention of the sea-trout's bigger cousin, and then probably good-by to the light tackle. But as it was certainly no fun to catch sea-trout on a salmon rod, Maud took this chance with a light heart.

The day was one of those gray days (so rare in the North, where "gray day" means usually East wind, which sucks the color from land and sky), with a breeze from the southwest which makes heather and gorse and water all more brilliant and fragrant than even the sunlight can, and

preoccupied though Maud was with the prospects of the river, her mind kept paying little flying visits to the beauty of the morning. Five minutes after she left the lodge she was absolutely alone, and the sight of neither human being nor human habitation broke the intense solitude of eye and ear, which, to such as she, is so warm and dear a companionship. For she loved the pleasant things of the earth, the heather and the gorse, and the close, silent friendship of nature, unvexed and undistracted by human presences. To her, as to St. Francis, the trees were her dear brothers, the sky and the river her dear sisters, and somehow also the fish she hoped to slay were her friends and blood relations. She could not have explained that feeling; she would frankly have told you that it implied an inconsistency; but the fact that she hoped to kill them produced no discordant note.

And here was the rushing, jubilant river, which a wet May had filled from bank to bank. She struck it at the Bridge pool, over the rapids of which hung a swaying, airy suspension bridge, from which it took its name. Deep water lay on the near side, shoal water on the other, but just beyond the shoal-water, could she but cast over it, ran a little channel she knew well, where sea-trout lay. So she crossed the swaying bridge, debating within her the question of fly. The river was high and the sea-trout would take big flies;

but so, unfortunately, would the salmon. However, she must chance that and a possible breakage—the big fly was certainly the right game to play.

Five minutes was enough for the fixing of her apparatus, and with the fisherman's heart, which beats excitedly in the throat, she began casting from just underneath the bridge. But with her longest line she could not reach that channel of deep water; and if she did not reach that she might as well be fishing in a wash-tub. But—there was nobody within miles—and next minute she had kilted her skirts till she could wade out over that stupid shoal water and stand where, with the cool, bright water flowing near up to her knees, yet leaving her skirt unwetted, she could reach the deeper water beyond. For well she knew what a wet skirt meant to one who proposed to be fishing and walking all day—nobody could strive against that heavy, clinging thing—and as she waded out she hitched it an inch or two higher. Then for a moment she had to pause to laugh at the figure she must be inevitably presenting if there was any one present. There was a knitted jersey for her upper half, a cap of tweed, a much kilted skirt, and joy in her heart. Also, she could easily cast into the coveted channel.

There was a fin and a sort of gulp near her fly, and with another gulp her heart came upward

from her throat into her very mouth. But the owner of the fin had missed the fly, and the owner thereof was not a sea-trout but a salmon. Then in her the inbred sporting instinct usurped all other consciousness. Light though her rod was and light her tackle, since there was a salmon in the stream that felt an interest in her Jock Scott she must try to catch him. He might break her—well, let him. She had no gaff; very well, she must do without.

She waded ashore, being far too wise in fishing lore to cast over him again at once, preferring to wait a minute or two before she once more tempted him; and as she gained dry land she saw that there was a man half way across the bridge just above the pool. He had a fishing rod (light also like hers) in one hand and a landing-net tucked under his arm. In any case, his rod could not possibly refer to Thurso's river, and he was probably from Scarsdale, where she knew some new people had taken the lodge. But she gave him only the vaguest passing thought, being far more interested that moment in one particular fish than in any one particular man, and took no further notice of him, except that she unkilted her skirt a little. It showed really too much of what was vulgarly but correctly called "leg." Then, without giving any further glance at the figure on the bridge, who had paused, watching her, she walked

some ten yards up from where she had raised her fish, in order to be certain of casting over him again. The unkilted skirt dragged a little in the water, but she would have waded neck-deep after that fish. Also—this popped in and out of her mind—there was a man watching, and she had no objection to a gallery when she was fishing. Oh, she could fish!

Yard by yard she moved down to where the dear monster had risen before. That was the spot! Indeed it was. This time there was no fin to break the surface, but there was the true attack, the suddenly curved rod, the sudden message up the line. At the same moment, out of the corner of her eye, she saw that the man had moved from his place on the bridge and was coming up behind her on the bank.

But that occupied her very little. All she really knew was that she was at present the possessor of a light trout rod, fitted with light tackle, at the end of which for the moment was a salmon. Her landing net was somewhere on the bank, but it might as well have been in Jericho for all the use it could be in this emergency. Anyhow, two or three ecstatic minutes were hers. The fish bolted down stream, and her reel sang shrilly. Then, like an express train, he came back again, and with the calmness of despair she reeled in, thinking that he meant to go up under the bridge, which

was death and destruction to her and her rod. But he changed his mind, and once more, after two or three rushes, he was opposite her, shaking his head, so it seemed, for the rod jerked and jumped, yet no line ran out.

Maud had moved slowly back across the shoal-water during this, so as to gain the shore again, for she knew she must get somewhere where she could run, when from close behind her came a very pleasant voice.

"He's well-hooked," it said; "I saw him take it. He'll be off down stream in a minute, and there's a hundred yards of rapid before the next pool. I should be ready to run if I were you."

Maud still thought of nothing but her fish, which had already begun to bore slowly away into the deep water on the far side of the river, and she knew well what that would lead to. And she replied to the voice as if it had been only her own thoughts—which were identical—with which she was communing:

"Why, of course he's going down to the next pool," she said. "He's making for the deep water now. There!"

She splashed her way through the margin of the foot-deep water, and nearly fell over a stone just as the fish felt the full current of the river, and was off like an arrow down stream. Her reel screamed out, and there was a dreadful length



Then, still without looking away from the water she spoke to him again. Chapter II.

of line between her and the fly. But she was off like Atalanta after him; and before matters were wholly desperate, a bend in the rapids brought her nearer to him, and, still running, she reeled in. Then—oh, blessed haven!—he reached the deep water of the pool below, and swimming in small circles near the head of it allowed her to recapture more of her line. Then, still without looking away from the water (for she felt sure that the owner of the voice had come down with her), she spoke to him again.

“The humor of the situation is that I have only *the* very lightest tackle,” she said. “But, luckily, the fish doesn’t know that. And would you be so good as to get my landing-net? I left it on the bank just below the bridge.”

“I saw it, and brought it,” said the voice. “I should say a butterfly net would be about as useful. He’s a twenty-pounder!”

Maud suddenly laughed.

“I wonder what is going to happen next?” she cried. “Isn’t it fun not knowing? Oh, look!”

For the first time the fish jumped so as to show himself properly, and splashed soundingly back into the pool again.

“Twenty pounds and a few extra,” remarked the voice. “I told my gillie to be down here by eleven, and he’ll bring a gaff. He ought to be

in plenty of time. There'll be no gaffing going on yet."

That turned out to be perfectly true, and a dozen times in the next quarter of an hour Maud knew that she was within an ace of losing him. He behaved like the strong fresh-run fish that he was, making disconcerting rushes down to the very tail of the pool, and running out her line almost to its last yard, before she had time to follow along the stony bank. Then he would seek the very deepest holes, and lie there, shaking his head, and putting the most dangerous snapping strain on her fine gut. Then, with a rush, he would come straight back towards her, so that, do what she would, there were long perilous moments, though she reeled up with lightning hand, when he was on a slack line. But at length he began to tire, and instead of hurling himself about the pool allowed himself just to drift with the stream. That, too, was dangerous, for she had to tow him in towards her with the utmost gentleness, since both his dead weight and the press of the water were against her. Then again his savage pride awoke, and he would struggle against this mysterious compelling force, but he was weakening.

Maud felt this.

"Oh, isn't your gillie here yet?" she asked suddenly.

“ Yes, he came several minutes ago. Shall I gaff him for you, or shall he? ”

“ Who is he? ” asked Maud.

“ It’s Duncan, my lady,” said another voice.

“ Oh, then, Duncan, please,” said she. “ Is that rude of me? But, you see, I know Duncan. Get further down, Duncan; get below him, so that he can’t see you! ”

But there were several agitating moments yet. Each time the fish drifted with the stream she towed him a little nearer to the bank, but though he was very weak now, and his struggles short, he was still capable of unexpected momentary violences. But at last he was a mere log, floating with fin out of the water, and broad silvery side shining. With a quick, crafty movement Duncan had him on the bank.

“ Kill him quickly, Duncan! ” she said. “ Oh, what a darling! Quite fresh from the sea.”

Then, for the first time, Maud turned to look at the stranger, and found a tall, pleasant, clean-shaven young man smiling at her.

“ I really am extremely obliged to you,” she said. “ I could not possibly have landed him without your gaff.”

He laughed at this, showing very white, even teeth.

“ Why, I think that is so,” he said. “ But I

am your debtor much more. I never saw a fish handled so well. Look at your tackle, too! ”

“ Oh, I know the water,” said she, “ and that makes so much difference.”

Then suddenly the conjunction of a total stranger with a rod on her brother’s river and in company with one of her brother’s keepers struck her as odd.

“ I am afraid I have detained you very long,” she said, “ if you are going to fish at Scarsdale.”

“ No, I am fishing here,” he said. “ At least I shall go a mile or so down, and begin there.”

This was more solidly incomprehensible. Yet the man did not look like a poacher, a trespasser; and how did it come about that Duncan was with him? Maud got just a shade dignified.

“ I’m sure you will excuse me,” she said, “ but you know this is my brother, Lord Thurso’s, river? ”

Again the stranger laughed, with very sincere but quiet merriment.

“ Yes, I know,” he said; “ but he has been kind enough to let the fishing to me.”

Maud stood quite silent a moment. The horror of the situation that was dawning on her absolutely tied her tongue. Her brother had let the fishing, and here was she caught, a red-handed poacher, by the tenant himself!

“ What? ” she said.

The stranger took off his hat.

“Pray allow me to introduce myself,” he said. “I am Walter Cochran. Excuse me, I really can’t help laughing. It is funny, you know!”

Maud, already flushed with excitement and exercise, grew perfectly crimson.

“Oh, what am I to do?” she cried. “It is too awful! I can never forgive myself.”

She raised her eyes to his again, and saw there such genuine kindly amusement that, in spite of her horror, she laughed herself.

“Oh, don’t make me laugh,” she said. “It is too dreadful. Poaching! I thought you were poaching, and it is I.”

“Yes, it’s serious,” he said, “and it’s for me to make conditions.”

Maud had one moment’s fleeting terror that he was going to make an ass of himself, as she phrased it—and to kiss her hand, or something dreadful. But he did not look that sort.

“Oh, my conditions are not difficult,” he said. “I only insist on your not cutting short your day’s fishing.”

“Oh, don’t,” she said. “I don’t think I could fish any more.”

“I think you must make an effort. Really, I insist on it. We shan’t get in each other’s way. I am going a couple of miles down.”

The situation, which five minutes ago was so

excruciating, had absolutely melted and vanished. Had Maud been told that morning what was to happen to her before lunch she would have felt ready to sink into the earth with shame, while, even two minutes ago, there was nothing so impossible as to imagine herself continuing to fish. But the man was so unaffectedly friendly; his amusement also at her horror was so kindly that she was no longer horrified.

“ Really, Mr. Cochran, you are too kind,” she said. “ But you must first put me at my ease about one thing. You do know, don’t you, how sorry I am, and that I hadn’t the slightest notion that Thurso had let the fishing. Oh, by the way, I am Maud Stratton.”

“ Why, of course I knew all that without your telling me,” he said. “ So it’s all settled.”

She smiled at him.

“ Thank you very much,” she said. “ I shall love to have this day on the river.”

“ And Duncan? ” he said. “ Pray keep him if you want him. Otherwise I shall send him home. His wife is ill of this—this typhoid.”

“ Oh, no, please send him home,” said Maud.

Then Cochran turned to the gillie.

“ Get along home, Duncan,” he said, “ and you will find the wife ever so much better. She’s been getting better all morning. But if you give her any of that medicine you will be just helping her

to get worse again. You understand? If you find she's worse, you can give it her. But she isn't; she's better. Yes, gaff, landing-net, lunch. I've got them all. Keep up a good heart, man. God's looking after her this morning. She's going to get quite well. Don't lose sight of that; don't let her lose sight of it either."

He had apparently quite forgotten about Maud as he spoke, and had turned side face to her as he talked to the gillie. And, as he spoke, though all the kindness and merriment that had been in his face when he talked to Maud were there still, yet there shone through all some intense vital seriousness. He had laid his hand on Duncan's shoulder, and made his little speech with an extraordinary air of authority. Then he nodded to him in dismissal, and turned to Maud again, while Duncan trudged off down the river bank.

"I'm so sorry for you and Lord Thurso," he said, "and I think it's downright good of you to have come up, right in the middle of the season, just because your folk here were ill. It's real kind of you."

Then his eye fell on the fish.

"Hi, Duncan," he called out after the retreating figure, "take her ladyship's fish up to the lodge. Where are your manners?"

Duncan came back, stuffed the fish into his creel

and shouldered it. But he paused a moment before he went again.

“ But the wife is better, sir? ” he asked.

“ Ever so much better. You know that as well as I do, so don’t forget it, since you help to make her better by knowing it all the time. Now, off with you. You’ve got to look after the baby, as she thinks she can’t. Make it happy; give it a real good time, and let it pull your beard.”

He watched Duncan tramp away again with his heavy Scotch tread down the river bank.

“ Dear blind man! ” he said, half to himself.

“ But the light is coming to him.”

Maud was already “ arrested ” by Mr. Cochran—she paid, that is to say, a good deal more attention to him than she paid to nine-tenths of casual strangers with whom she was, as now, brought rather intimately in contact. He had the arresting quality, whatever that is, which compels attention. It may be called magnetism, but it has not got the slightest connection with love or hate, like or dislike—it may, in fact, and often does, co-exist with each and all of those. At present, it had not occurred to Maud in the remotest degree whether she liked or disliked Mr. Cochran; she only knew that he arrested her. He was very quiet in manners, quite well-bred, rather good looking, and in all these things he was in no way distinguished from the ordinary world in which

she lived. But there was, and she knew it, something that marked him off from all men she had ever seen, and pausing to think for one half-second, she saw what it was. He was so happy. Happiness of a sort that was new to her surrounded him like an atmosphere which somehow it was given to others—herself, for instance, at this moment—to breathe, and it radiated from him, and shone on others. Hundreds of people were happy, thank God—that is a very common complaint—but never had she seen anyone so consciously, vitally happy. It was as if he had just heard some extraordinary good news, or as if he had once heard news so good that it was ever new to him. Yet it was no retrospective happiness; it gushed from him as from some eternal spring.

This impression was made, as all strong impressions are made, in an infinitesimal moment, and there was no pause between his parting speech to Duncan and her taking up the casual thread of talk. All the same, was the thread casual? For his speech to Duncan, which Maud took up, seemed to come from his very heart and soul.

“ I don’t understand,” she said. “ Why did you say that poor Duncan’s wife only thought she was ill? ”

The brown, happy, amused eyes looked at her a moment before he replied.

“ Why, doesn’t that come somewhere in Shake-

speare," he asked, " ' There's nothing either right or wrong but thinking makes it so; ' or words to that effect? "

" Yes, poor soul, but if we take that literally we must conclude that if she thought she was well she would be. It is hard to think that when you happen to have typhoid."

The brown eyes got graver, but not less happy.

" Certainly, it is hard," he said, " indeed impossible, unless you can think right. But when one can do that all the rest follows."

Maud suddenly felt slightly antagonistic to him. She remembered the few words she had had with Thurso last night about people who are always well because they think so, and his conclusion that they must be fools. She had tacitly agreed with him then, and was slightly vexed with Mr. Cochran now because honestly he did not seem to be one.

" Have you ever had toothache? " she asked.

" Fortunately not. But if I had, I shouldn't."

Then the name she had been unable to remember the night before came back to her.

" Ah, then you are a Christian Scientist," she said. " You think all pain and illness is unreal."

He laughed again.

" I know it," he said. " Now, I am sure you want to get on with your fishing. So there's your rod, and please keep the gaff. You are much

more likely to hook another salmon in the upper pools than I am down below."

He had changed the subject with such bare-faced suddenness that she could not help remarking on it. Yet, abrupt as it had been, it had not been ill-bred.

"Do you often change the subject as quickly as that?" she asked.

"Always, if—you won't mind my saying it—strangers talk to me about Christian Science. I don't proselytize, you see; I don't think that is the best way to make truth known. Also, Lady Maud, one can't talk about the subject which means more to one than the whole world with people who really only ask questions about it out of a sort of, well, derisive curiosity."

The words were extremely direct; in ninety-nine mouths out of a hundred they would have been rude. Yet, though Maud felt still antagonistic, she knew that the most sensitive person in the world could not have suspected a trace of rudeness or offence in them, so entirely sweetly and good-naturedly were they spoken. He made this particularly plain statement without the slightest hint of resentment or fear of arousing it. And Maud, generous and open as himself, gave in at once.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "You are quite right. There was a touch—really not more

—of what you so justly call derisive curiosity in my mind. It was quite wrong of me. But may I ask you a question with that touch left out, honestly left out? ”

“ Why, of course, a hundred,” said he.

“ Then, why don’t you proselytize? ” she asked. “ If you are convinced of the truth of it all, isn’t it your duty to spread it? ”

Walter Cochran let his eyes wander from her face over the hillside, fragrant with heather and humming with bees. Then they looked at her again, and for the first time she saw that they were different to any eyes she had ever seen in the face of woman or man, for they were the eyes of a child, with a child’s terrible honesty and disarming frankness.

“ You can spread a thing in many ways,” he said. “ But preaching was not the primary way He chose. He went about doing good.”

Maud felt suddenly that shyness which is instinctive in most Anglo-Saxons when “ religion ” comes on the conversational board. With many people, no doubt, reticence on religion is due to the fact that since they have none, there is nothing to talk about. But it was not so with her; religion formed a very vital and essential part of her life, but it was not one to be publicly trotted out. So, since the subject had so unexpectedly

and profoundly deepened with this last remark, it was she who changed it now.

“ I see,” she said, and then paused. “ But, please, don’t leave me the gaff. I should immensely like, since you are so kind, to get another sea-trout or two; but having poached one salmon without your leave, I really couldn’t poach another. If I hook another, he shall break me, and so I shall present your river with a fly and some gut by way of *amende*. ”

Then the idea of offering hospitality, which had occurred to and been rejected by Thurso, occurred to her. “ And do come and dine with us to-morrow,” she said, “ and eat some of your own fish. Thurso and I would be delighted. We are just squatters in the lodge, you know—eat and live in one room, and have a dreadful cook. Oh, I forgot; we are turning the house into a typhoid hospital, and by the evening the place will be full of patients. Please say ‘ no ’ point blank, if you don’t like the thought. I shall quite understand. ”

Walter Cochran gave her a swift, admiring glance.

“ Why, that’s just splendid of you,” he said; “ and as for coming to dinner, I shall be charmed. We Scientists are often told we are inconsistent, but I guess we’re not quite so inconsistent as to mind coming to a house because a few poor souls

think they are ill. So *au revoir*, Lady Maud, and many thanks."

Maud was a girl of great singleness of purpose, and in the ordinary way, when she was out for a day's fishing, the number of thoughts that came into her head which did not bear directly on fish might be counted on the fingers of the hand, while even these were present to her mind in only a very far off and indistinct fashion. But to-day, during the hour's fishing that she indulged in before lunch, her thoughts were persistently elsewhere, and when eventually she made herself a windless seat in the heather overlooking the pool which she had just fished, even the brace of sea-trout she had already caught, and the prospective brace or so that she promised herself after lunch, actually occupied a very small part of her reflections.

"Christian Science!" She had indeed a "touch of derision" for that philosophy and its philosophers, which was not entirely founded on ignorance. Only last year Alice Yardly, a friend of hers, had joined that church, and Maud had summed up the situation by saying that she had always thought that Alice—though a dear—was a fool, and now she knew it. Certainly, however, Lady Yardly did not in the least resemble Mr. Cochran either in the matter of folly, because it

was impossible to think of him as a fool, or in the matter of proselytizing. For Lady Yardly used to proselytize (quite unsuccessfully) by the hour, pouring out a perfect torrent of optimistic gabble about the non-existence of pain and sickness, and be prostrated next day by one of the nervous headaches to which she was subject. She would call this a false claim (though it was at least an admirable imitation of the true), "demonstrate" over it, which, being interpreted, meant assuring herself that she could not have a nervous headache, since there was no nervous headache in Divine Love, after which she would go to bed, and wake up next morning without any headache, convinced that her demonstration had banished it. But as these headaches had never been known to last more than one day, its disappearance on the following one did not appear to Maud to be quite so triumphant an instance of the truth of Christian Science as she herself thought.

And then this dreadful delirium of words, texts torn up from their roots and made to prove anything, the flying leaves in Mrs. Eddy's "Key to the Scriptures" for paragraphs bearing on the point, all to convince Maud, as far as she could see, of what she herself put differently when she said that mind had a great influence over matter. But that proved to be an utter mistake, and wouldn't do for Lady Yardly at all, who insisted

that there was no matter, and never had been, except through the error of mortal mind. And then it would be time for her to go and dress for dinner, put on what was mistakenly believed to be a very smart white satin gown, and cover her very pretty but entirely unreal neck with a non-existent dog collar of purely imaginary diamonds. Last winter, too, Alice Yardly had a false claim of influenza, and after a week of demonstrating over it and not taking ordinary precautions it had developed into a further false claim of congestion of the lungs. Three weeks more demonstrating over congestion of the lungs (combined this time with stopping in bed, though that had really nothing to do with it) had led to her complete recovery, and the subsequent recital of this wonderful cure at a testimony meeting. But when Maud asked her why, if she was going to condescend to stop in bed at all (especially since stopping in bed had nothing to do with the cure), she should not have done so when she had the false claim of influenza instead of waiting for a false claim of congestion, this led only to the kind Christian Science smile, and a voluble explanation, with torrents of words and texts, to point out once again from the very beginning that she did not have influenza at all. No further progress, in fact, could be made over the argument, for though Lady Yardly did not refuse to answer questions, she

answered them with such volubility and with so stern a determination never to be brought up to the point at issue, that it was impossible for the enquirer to proceed. All sickness and illness was inconceivable, so said Lady Yardly, because everything was Infinite Mind (mortal mind did not really exist any more than matter), and to state that fact over and over again in a variety of ways was held to answer any question that might be asked, of whatever kind.

Of course, Lady Yardly was silly; she seemed sometimes to have no mind, either mortal or anything else; she was always that—though a dear—and Maud, as she sat here now eating her lunch in this nook in the heather, with the wild bees buzzing about her, and all the infinite beneficent powers of Nature pursuing their way heedless of any interpretations that man might choose to put upon them, felt she had done an injustice in expecting a woman who was, yes, very silly, to answer questions which, though quite simple, were undeniably profound, in that they concerned the origin of things. Lady Yardly had not been a Christian Scientist very long, and Maud told herself that it was absurd to expect her all at once (she who had understood so little before) to understand everything. But what rather nettled her, though indeed she was not easily nettled, was to find that this same dear, stupid person did pro-

fess herself able to explain everything—mind, matter and God alike. She claimed to have recaptured the faith of a child, and to argue like a theologian about it. Maud herself was a professed and believing Christian, but had a brilliant Atheist subtly questioned her on the doctrine of the Incarnation, she knew quite well that he could pose her, *unless* she clung to the simple fact, which she believed, that God was made man. She could not answer questions he might easily put her about transubstantiation and the Presence, but she hoped she would not try by turning a blinding squirt of texts upon him to make him believe that she could explain everything in the material and spiritual world. She could not—certain things were mysterious. But why not say so? That these things were mysterious did not prevent her being a Christian. She believed, too, the root doctrine of Christian Science, that God was the author of the world, and permeated it all. But surely it was simpler and truer to confess that one did not understand the whole working of the world in all its details. For if one did, one could manage it all one's self. Lady Yardly, Maud felt sure, would undertake it with the greatest pleasure. And a pretty mess she would make of it! thought she. For Alice could never contrive that the carriage should ever call for anybody either at the right time or the right place.

Yet . . . the law of gravity, so Maud believed, was in sound working order, but if one asked a mere child to explain it, and he explained it wrongly, that should not make one distrust the law, but only the ability of the exponent. And in Christian Science, one person surely knew more about it (or, anyhow, knew he did not know) than another, and she confessed to herself that she had formed her present idea of it on the answers, or want of answers, given her by a Scientist whom she had always thought silly. No doubt there were others who were not silly. But what a pity that the silly ones were allowed to gabble like this! Lady Yardly had tried to proselytize her, and had only convinced her of the absurdity of her tenets. But Mr. Cochran had refused to proselytize her, and she would rather like to hear what he had to say about it.

A great fish jumped clear out of the water in the pool at her feet, a noble silver-sided salmon, which for the moment made her fisherman's heart leap in her throat. Well, it was no use trying for him—a fish that leaped like that never took the fly. Then she smiled at herself, for she knew that though that reason was sound enough, it was not for that that she still sat in her sheltered place. She was interested in something else; she wanted to think about that.

Mr. Cochran did not seem silly; in fact, she felt

sure he was not silly. What if she asked him when he came to dine to-morrow night a few questions which Alice Yardly had failed to answer? There would be no derision now, for in this half hour of communing with herself she had convinced herself that she wanted to know. There was no such thing as illness—he had said that, he had told Duncan that. What then if she appealed to him, told him how many of these poor folk had died, and were dying of typhoid, and asked him to stop it all? Yet that was too much to ask; it seemed profane, as if she asked him to invest himself in the insignia of Divinity. But might he not, she asked, as she could now ask him, without derision, without, as far as she could manage it, unbelief in the huge power which he distinctly professed to wield, might he not relieve one sufferer, make well one of those forty who would be lying sick in the house to-morrow? But then there occurred to her the parrot-like answer of Alice Yardly when she had asked her the same question. It *was* parrot-like, glib, and without conviction or sense of true meaning, when she had told her that it was wrong to make a “cure” for a sign. How hopelessly she misunderstood! Maud did not want a sign, she wanted that suffering should be relieved. How was it possible or human to withhold that power simply because she would be interested to see it manifested? It was in-

human to withhold it, if its possessor really believed that it was his.

But there was Thurso. It was better that he should not know that she intended to ask Mr. Cochran to do this, or indeed that he should know that she had asked it. There Alice Yardly's contention seemed to her to be possibly true. The presence of unbelief might indeed hamper the power of faith. But if Thurso did not know, there would be no unbelief which could hamper it. She herself did not disbelieve, and, honestly, she wanted to believe. She derided no longer; she was conscious of an open mind on the subject. She believed in the miraculous cures of ancient days; she saw no reason why modern days should not witness them again.

Yet why had her mind changed, and the derision vanished? To be truthful, it was because of this man's personality. He seemed wise and gentle and self-reliant in that he relied on an infinite power. He himself entirely trusted in that power, and it was exactly that which made Maud trust him. Then she pulled herself up with a jerk—she had seen this man once for ten minutes, and already she was letting her imagination run riot about him. She took to her fishing instead.

CHAPTER III

THE shifting and removal of furniture and carpets necessary for the reception of the patients next day, as well as the bringing in of the appliances of the sick room, were complete when Maud got home that evening, and she found the doctor who had superintended this just on the point of leaving. He had no very cheering account to give of several of the patients whom Maud asked after, but there was at least this cause for thankfulness in that no fresh case had appeared during the day.

“ And that, too, is rather odd,” he said, “ for we have not yet been able to discover what the cause of the outbreak was, so that we have not intentionally cut off any source of infection. But I am quite content not to know what it was, provided it is cut off.”

“ Yes, indeed,” said she. “ And to-morrow you will fill up all the beds here? ”

“ Yes. Of course, one has to take certain risks, and for the sake of the fresher air and better attention they can receive here I am going to move some very serious cases. Really, Lady Maud, doctor though I am and prescriber of drugs, sometimes I wonder whether all the contents of all the

chemists' shops in the world have the healing power of fresh air and quiet."

"Oh, do you think that quiet cures as many people as work?" asked she.

He laughed.

"Well, work is the best medicine if you are not ill, and rest if you are," he said. "By the way, I should like to say just once how splendid I think it is of you and Lord Thurso to give the house up like this."

"It was entirely Thurso's idea," she said, "and it really seemed so obvious when he suggested it. Has he come in yet, do you know?"

"Yes, he came in half an hour ago, in great pain with one of those neuralgic headaches, I am afraid. He is rather overdone. He wants rest."

Maud made a little quick movement toward him.

"Not seriously?" she asked. "You don't mean that there is anything to be anxious about?"

"No, but as long as he is continually anxious himself and constantly tired, those headaches will probably be rather frequent. One only hopes he will get rest soon; one does not want them to become chronic."

"Chronic?"

"Yes, that is one of the penalties of being

highly-strung from a nervous point of view. His nerves are very easily excited—one does not want him to get a habit of that.”

Maud was silent a moment. Then she spoke in a lower tone.

“ He takes laudanum when he is in great pain,” she said. “ Is that unwise? ”

“ It would be unwise to continue doing so for long together. I did not know, by the way, that he took it. But I hope, and there is reason for hoping to-day, that we have seen the worst of this epidemic. He ought to be able to get away before many days. I tell you frankly, I shall be glad when he does.”

“ Ought he to go now, do you think? ” she asked.

Dr. Symes looked at her a moment before replying.

“ No, I think he ought to stop here. He is running a certain risk of producing that chronic condition of irritated nerves, and also a certain risk in stopping the pain by the use of laudanum. But I think, well, his duty keeps him here. Our orders and the nurses’ orders are obeyed when they know that Lord Thurso is backing us up. You have no idea of the difficulties we had before you and he came. Well, I must get down to the village again. And, Lady Maud, I like brave people like you and your brother. Good-night!

The patients will begin to arrive early to-morrow."

Thurso, to his sister's great relief, came down to dinner in the most equable and cheerful spirits. All trace of his headache had vanished, and Maud thought that Dr. Symes must have been mistaken about it. In any case, according to her plan, it was her part to take his thoughts away from the sombreness of the day, and she had the huge comedy of her own poaching to talk about.

"Thurso, I've done the most awful thing that anyone ever did," she said. "After you went out this morning I went down to fish in the river, and was firm in a salmon when—when Mr. Walter Cochran appeared. How could you forget to tell me you had let the fishing? There I was, tied to it, to his fish. And of course I didn't know him from Adam."

Thurso, for the first moment, was almost as horrified as Maud had been.

"Good Lord!" he said. "I hope you lost the fish."

"Not at all. Owing to Mr. Cochran, I landed it. In the nick of time down came Duncan—his gillie, not ours at all—with a gaff. Mr. Cochran looked on with interest and sympathy. I had only light tackle for sea-trout. The whole situation dawned on me by degrees, but not before I

had told Mr. Cochran in a rather dignified manner that it was your river. But I asked him to come and dine to-morrow night and help to eat his own fish.”

Thurso broke out into immoderate laughter.

“ Oh, dear, oh, dear! ” he cried. “ What would I not have given to be there when the situation dawned on you. And to ask him to dinner was to add insult to injury. You are caught poaching—poaching, you know—and then ask the rightful owner to come and have some. A perfect stranger, too. He will probably cable an exaggerated account of it to a New York newspaper, or the paper of whatever town he comes from. At least, it can’t be exaggerated. Even American ingenuity would be taxed to concoct anything more outrageous than the simple truth.”

Maud joined in his laughter.

“ It is pretty bad,” she said. “ And then we sat and talked, and really he is delightful. He asked me to go on fishing, too; and you will scarcely believe it, but I did, and caught six sea-trout. He made it quite easy for me to say ‘ yes.’ I couldn’t have said ‘ no.’ ”

Thurso laughed again.

“ But how could you? ” he asked. “ I never heard such brazen cheek.”

“ Not at all. When you see Mr. Cochran you will understand how simple it was.”

“ I have seen him. I am sure it was he I met yesterday down in the village. It occurred to me then that we might ask him to dinner. It was that I began to suggest last night.”

“ Well, don’t you understand then? ”

Thurso considered this.

“ Yes; even though I did not speak to him, I think I do. He does seem to me the sort of man whose sea-trout you might catch after he had caught you poaching his salmon. That’s rather a high compliment. It is a great gift to be able to make people not ashamed of themselves. I should have sunk into the earth with shame, but you say that Mr. Cochran would very kindly have pulled me out.”

There was a moment’s pause, during which Maud debated whether she should tell her brother that Mr. Cochran was a Christian Scientist. But his remark that it was not his “ way ” to proselytize made her decide not to. Then Thurso spoke again.

“ Do you know it is the first day that I haven’t felt simply overwhelmed with depression and anxiety? ” he said. “ There has been no fresh case since morning, and Duncan’s wife, who, like Sandy, was almost despaired of, has taken a sudden inexplicable turn for the better. She was dying of sheer exhaustion from fever, and now all day she has been gaining strength, gaining it

quickly, too. I saw Duncan this evening. He—really, I wondered whether he had been drinking.”

“Drinking?” asked Maud. “Why, Duncan’s a teetotaler.”

“The worst sort of drunkard,” remarked Thurso rather cynically.

“Oh, don’t be cheap,” said Maud. “Duncan’s as sober as I am. Go on. It interests me.”

“Well, it all leads back to Mr. Cochran again,” he said. “Anyhow, when I looked in to-night before coming up, there was Duncan sitting by his wife’s bedside, nursing the baby, who was, with extraordinary gurgles, trying to swarm up his beard. Fancy bringing a baby into a room where there was a typhoid patient! Of course I got Duncan and the baby out, and told him that his wife was really on the mend, as the nurse had just told me. I thought he would like to hear that, but apparently he had known it all day. Our Mr. Cochran had told him that his wife was getting better every minute.”

“Yes, I heard him tell him,” said Maud.

“Well, but how did he know?” asked Thurso. “This morning they thought she couldn’t live through the day. And, anyhow, what has our Mr. Cochran got to do with it? And who is he apart from the fact that you kindly poached a salmon of his?”

Maud had no reply to this at once. "Our Mr. Cochran" had repudiated preaching on his own account; certainly then it was not her business to preach for him.

"Anyhow, our Mr. Cochran looks quite all right," she said.

"I know he does. But apparently if Mr. Cochran tells Duncan that his wife is going to get better, when she is in the very jaws of death, Duncan has only got to walk home, and find that it is so. Oh, and another thing. Dr. Symes called there this afternoon on his round, and Duncan kindly but quite firmly refused to let him in at all unless he promised not to give her any more medicine. So he promised, because, as he told me, she was absolutely past hope when he saw her last. Then he wanted to take her temperature, but Duncan, again firmly, threw the thermometer into the grate, though it wasn't exactly medicine. That is why I supposed he was drunk."

"No, I'm sure he wasn't drunk," said Maud again. "Go on, dear!"

They had finished dinner, and Thurso left the table to get a cigarette.

"That's all," he said. "Dr. Symes tells me he has seen that sort of recovery before, but somehow I feel it odd that our Mr. Cochran should, so to speak, have foreseen it. Is he a crank, do you think? A spiritualist or something of that

kind? Not that I believe in them, but any quack goes right sometimes."

Again Maud mentally reviewed her decision not to do Mr. Cochran's preaching (which he would not do himself) for him.

"How do you expect me to know?" she said. "I talked to a stranger for ten minutes. But he's coming to dine to-morrow, so you can judge for yourself. And how have you been? No headache?"

He glanced at her sharply and sideways a moment, as if suspecting something.

"Headache?" he asked. "I don't seem much like headache this evening, do I? Why?"

"Only Dr. Symes said he was afraid you were in pain."

Thurso shrugged his shoulders.

"Lord, how those doctors jaw!" he said. "They want everybody to be ill, in order to make them well. Amiable, but rather egoistic."

Maud asked no further questions about this, nor sought to excuse Dr. Symes's blunder. But, knowing him, it seemed to her very odd that he should have thought that Thurso had been suffering if he had not. For it was only when he was in the extreme of pain that anyone, even a doctor, could guess that he was on the rack, for it had to be much screwed down before he visibly

winned. For one moment it flashed through her mind that he had been in pain and had taken laudanum, and had—well, practically lied to her about it, for his answer, though slightly evasive, certainly was meant to bear the construction that he had had neither headache nor drug. But she dismissed that at once, and if Thurso told her anything, or implied it, it was not her habit to question the truth of it.

The two sat up rather late that night. Maud, like all young strong folk, hated going to bed as much as, if not more, than she hated getting up, and it was usually Thurso who proposed the adjournment. But to-night he was extraordinarily alert. As he had said, to-day had been the first day in which there had been any break in that tempest of illness which was devastating the village; to-day also he had been better himself, and spoke of other things than the immediate preoccupations that surrounded them. Chief among them was London and the reopening of Thurso House. His father, the last holder of the title, had died just a year ago, and next week the house was to celebrate its re-entry into London life with an adequately magnificent ball. His wife, who had stopped in town, was seeing to this, and when Lily undertook to see to a thing, it was unnecessary for anyone else, however closely concerned,

to feel any anxiety about the completeness with which it would be seen to.

“ I heard from Lily this morning,” he said; “ at least I heard from her typewriter. She did not even sign it. She is up to the eyes in a million things, and really it seems to me as if the most of the festivities as well as all the charities in this world would collapse unless she was president of them all. The ball next week, too! I shall go up for the night, of course, though whether I stop depends on how things go here. You will come, won’t you? ”

Maud looked at him in studiedly mild surprise.

“ Good gracious, Thurso,” she said. “ Did you suppose that Thurso House was going to make its *début* again, and me not there? Of course, I shall come. It will be crammed with kings and queens like ‘ Alice in Wonderland.’ Oh, Thurso, what a good thing Lily is so smart. I hate the word, but she is, she’s magnificent. If you go in for the world, there are only two sorts of party possible, either to have your grand party, as she’s going to do now, with kings and queens literally treading on each other’s toes, or have quiet little dinners, as she does, with two or three real friends. I hate the middling parties, where a lot of mere acquaintances are asked to meet some Serene Transparency from Lower Germany. Of course you will go, and of course I’ll come with you. Do

have a special train all the way to London. It will be so expensive. Lily said to me the other day, 'If you don't have a special, go third class.' She is quite consistent about it herself, too."

"She usually has specials," remarked Thurso.

"But she does go third class, and talks to the navvy opposite. And on the tops of omnibuses. I have often been with her on the top of an omnibus. But she doesn't go in cabs; she says they are middling. When the twenty-five million horsepower motor is there, up she gets on the omnibus. She never stops them either, because of the horses. She runs after them, and gets on quite beautifully."

"Gets on? "

"Yes, on the 'bus, and with all the other people sitting on the top of it."

"That's a new game, isn't it? "

"Yes; it's becoming quite popular, owing to her. She is splendid! I admire her quite enormously."

Thurso laughed.

"So do I. And it's something to admire your wife when you've been married twelve years."

Maud made a little sideways movement in her chair, as if her position had become suddenly uncomfortable. Her brother continued:

"I don't believe a woman ever existed who was so clearly admirable," he said. "We went to the

opera together the night before I came up here. She was going to the Buckingham Palace ball afterwards, and was—well, suitably dressed.”

Maud felt, as she always felt when Thurso talked like this, as if a file had been drawn across her teeth. Often as it had happened, she never got used to it. She tried to turn, not the conversation, but its tone.

“ Oh, how? ” she asked with deep and genuine interest, for, like all healthily-minded girls, she loved beautiful clothes, especially when beautiful people wore them. “ She always makes everybody else look dowdy and badly dressed. That must be such fun! ”

“ Well, she had the diamond palisade, as she calls it, in her hair, and the ruby plaster. Her dress? I don’t know what it was, but it looked—well, you know what whipped cream looks like compared to cream—it looked like whipped gold. Sort of froth of gold—not yellow, but gold. Melba was in the middle of the ‘ Jewel Song ’ when we came in, but at the end of it nobody was paying the slightest attention to her. Every opera-glass in the house was turned on Lily. She applauded Melba vigorously and split a glove. But nobody else did, though she sang divinely.”

He got up and chucked his cigarette-end away.

“ And she’s my wife,” he said, and the four words carried tons of irony.

Maud got up also. She hated this, and she knew it all so well. It was only to her that Thurso talked like that.

“ Oh, it is such a pity,” she said. “ You are both such splendid people, you know. And—and——”

“ And I bore her, and she gets on my nerves,” he remarked.

Maud gave a little labial sound of disapproval, which is usually written, “ Tut, tut.”

“ Don’t say such things,” she exclaimed. “ It is a pity to say them just because they are true; if they weren’t true it wouldn’t particularly signify. But to say a true thing, when that thing is a pity, only makes it more real. Speech stamps everything. You don’t do her justice, any more than she does you justice. You both expect the other to be like them. What beautiful grammar! And—Thurso, she isn’t happy any more than you are.”

“ Why do you think that? She makes forty-eight hours out of every day, and fills them all, while the world, like you and me, looks on with envious admiration. That is her ideal. She attains it always. And Lady Thurso’s husband claps his hands too!”

Maud took him by the shoulder and shook him gently.

“ Idiot!” she said. “ Idiot! Think it over. I

am going to bed. Thank me for catching so many beautiful fish."

"I'm not sure that I thank you for asking Mr. Cochran to dinner to-morrow," he said. "Maud, I do like these quiet evenings with you. We are not smart. Neither you nor I."

"No; it's our defect, dear. Besides, I am, when I choose. I shall be smart at your ball. Good-night. What a nice day it has been! No fresh case of typhoid to-day for the people, and no headache for you, and a salmon for me. The luck is coming our way!"

The next day was wholly given up to the installation of the typhoid patients. Carpets and curtains had been rolled up and beds brought up and down from basement and attic, so that the utmost accommodation might be furnished in the large rooms on the ground floor. Dr. Symes had decided that it was better to run a little risk and move even bad cases up here, for the sake of the more immediate attention and the larger supply of fresh air than was possible when they were scattered about in cottage rooms, and the ambulance, going backwards and forwards all day, brought grave burdens on it. But by five in the afternoon the work of transportation was done, and the house was full. Afterwards the doctors went the round of their patients, and such risk as

might have been run was well justified by results. Not one apparently had suffered for the move, and now, instead of their being in small, ill-ventilated chambers, they were airily housed, with every facility for constant supervision from the nurses. Most, too, were going on very well, but there was one case, that of Sandy, the gillie, which was as serious as it could be. Like many strong men, it seemed as if the fever had appropriated his strength, vampire-like, for its own nourishment, and Dr. Symes, before he left, had given orders that he should be sent for at once if any further unfavorable symptoms appeared. Duncan's wife, it is true, had been in no less perilous a case this very morning; it was very unlikely that two should be snatched from the closing jaws of death.

Thurso had been in the house the whole day, feeling it conscientiously impossible not to be there, and when it was all over he went to the room in which he and Maud lived, desperately tired, and intending to get an hour's sleep before dinner. But because one has an intention, however innocent or laudable, it does not necessarily follow that one's best efforts are able to put it into effect, and instead, in this instance, having composed himself to sleep, he felt broadly and staringly awake. As he lay on the sofa, with his face away from the light, his eyes shut and his

attitude conducive to repose, a hundred vivid pictures crossed his brain. An interminable series of stretchers, each with its still fever-stricken burden upon it, came up the uncarpeted stairs, and even as he hoped that their monotonous procession was the precursor of unconsciousness, another image stole in by the back door, so to speak, and diverted his attention. Maud had gone fishing yesterday, and had enjoyed good sport, so the procession of stretchers was interrupted only to make way for the vision of her landing fish after fish, till it seemed that this endless repetition must end in sleep. But the back door opened again, and reverting to their conversation of the night before, Lily stood at the head of the stairs in Thurso House receiving kings and queens, and queens and kings. But the drowsiness produced by that ended again not in slumber, but in something that was very antagonistic to it. There was just a little stab—it was hardly pain—inside his head, as infinitesimal as the sound of an electric bell in the basement. Then it was repeated, but louder and more insistently, as if the bell were half-way up the kitchen stairs. Then—it was beginning to be pain now—it was as if the ringer of the electric bell grew impatient, and left his finger on it, while all the time the bell came closer. He was quite wide-awake now, and opened his eyes. Then he said to himself, “I am in for another.”

That was perfectly true and the prediction began to be fulfilled at once, a thing that ought to be satisfactory to the prophet. The idea of an electric bell ceased—it was pain, quite distinctly and decidedly. It stabbed half a dozen times with a firm, clear touch, and then for the moment it ceased. Immediately afterwards it began again, but differently. Instead of stabbing at the nerve, it laid a cold, steady finger on it, and the finger grew colder and steadier, till something inside his head seemed to ring with it, like a musical glass. Then came a brilliant passage of all sorts of pain, as if the orchestra had begun to accompany that dreadful solo; there was a long, cold note held down and wonderful *arpeggios* of torture crossed it up and down. That was the prelude.

In his room upstairs, which he could reach in four seconds, there stood on his dressing-table a bottle, not very large, which contained not only the antidote and instant cure of his pain, but blissful visions and the gift of ecstatic well-being. But the very fact that yesterday he had so lightly (or so it seemed now) had recourse to that, and had so revelled in the Paradise in which it instantly set him, made him this moment utterly turn his back on the idea of resorting to it again. If he had got to bear pain—and it really appeared as if he had—then he would set his teeth and bear

it, but he would not, at the cost of the formation of an evil habit, drug himself into remission from the pain, or, what even now while he was suffering tempted him more nearly, into that blissful harmony of being that the drug gave him.

Then his desire disguised itself and came to him more insidiously: there was a guest coming to dinner to-night: he could not simply retire to bed, leaving Maud to entertain Mr. Cochran, nor, on the other hand, did it seem to him to be physically possible that he should get through dinner in this state. Besides, the actual pain which was his at this moment was, he knew well, a mere bagatelle to what was coming. It was only the prelude as yet: a remarkably complete orchestra would soon begin. Yet his intention was still firm, he did not propose to seek the relief that was standing ready for him. He knew that his desire for it was so acute, not only because of the cessation of pain that it could bring, but because of the intense physical enjoyment that it gave him. It was there that his danger lay. Then with head splitting and buzzing with pain he went upstairs to dress and make ready to entertain his guest. He had some forty other guests, too, in the house: they, however, were well looked after.

Breeding, and what is implied by that much-misused word, includes courage of a rather heroic kind, since this sort of courage has no stirring

aids, no trumpets and drums to beat it up to its proper level. For it implies a greater command of self, a greater respect for the courtesies of life to be courageous in humdrum situations than in those to which romance and excitement impart stimulus, and certainly to-night Thurso's perfectly natural and even convivial manner toward his guest and his sister, while he himself was suffering pain of the most excruciating kind, was courage that deserved in its small sphere as much applause as some great Victoria Cross deed in a larger one. And though most people have more manliness than they or anybody else would have suspected, when pain has got to be borne or a heart-rending situation faced, yet to have the ready smile, the attentive ear, the genial manner, under such circumstances is a fine test of the courage of high-breeding. All through dinner this was triumphantly achieved by Thurso, and it was through no remission or failure on his part, but by instinct born of intimate knowledge on Maud's, that she knew that he was going through hells of physical torture. Sometimes he just bit his lip for a moment, sometimes in the middle of a sentence he would make a pause that was scarcely noticeable, sometimes he gripped his knife or fork so that the skin over his knuckles showed white, but that was all. He talked quite easily and naturally, made reference to Maud's poach-

ing expedition, and its satisfactory results as far as dinner was concerned, for the salmon was excellent, and went on to speak of the epidemic which had brought him up North.

“ But at last it shows some sign of abating,” he said, “ though we are still ignorant of the source of it. In fact, there has been no fresh case either to-day or yesterday.”

Maud looked up at Mr. Cochran, wishing rather intently that he would preach his Gospel. She felt somehow certain that it would do Thurso good, take his mind off the pain that flickered round him like a shower of knives. But the Gospel was veiled, at any rate.

“ I think it's so good of you to bring the cases up here,” he said. “ Lady Maud told me yesterday that you were doing so. I am sure it must help toward recovery to remove people from surroundings which they associate with illness to fresh bright places.”

He paused a moment.

“ One sees that every day,” he said. “ If you associate a place with pleasure you are pleased to go back. The mind, left to itself, clings so to material things. Because one has been happy in a certain room, one always thinks that those surroundings will tend to produce happiness again. It is one of the illusions we get rid of last.”

Thurso began to speak.

“You mean—” he said, and then stopped. For a moment he could not go on, so sharp an access of pain seized him. “You mean I shall always associate this house with typhoid and sick, suffering people?” he asked after a moment. “That is not very cheering.”

Walter Cochran’s happy, childlike eyes looked at Maud a moment, and then at his host.

“No, I mean just the opposite,” he said. “You will always associate this house with recovery, with the sweeping away of illness and pain.”

Dinner was at an end, and the momentary pause of cigarette-lighting followed. Walter Cochran had taken one as he spoke, but he did not light it, and laid it down on the cloth. Then he got up quickly.

“Lord Thurso, you are awfully brave,” he said. “I am sure you feel in horrible pain. Let me go right away now. I have enjoyed coming up to dine with Lady Maud and you ever so much.”

For the last minute or two the pain had become so much more acute that Thurso’s face was wet with perspiration. All during dinner, too, the longing, the drunkard’s desire to get to his room and take a dose from that healing bottle, had been growing. And now when his pain, in

spite of his gallantry in concealing it, was discovered, the desire became overwhelming, he could no longer check it.

“Pray don’t think of going away,” he said, “but if you will excuse me for ten minutes I will then rejoin you. Pray don’t go. I shall be down again in quite a short time. I have some medicine that never fails to set me right. Yes, the pain has been pretty bad.”

For one moment it appeared that Cochran had something on the tip of his tongue, for he turned to Thurso eagerly, his mouth open. But it was clear to Maud, when he did speak, that the speech was not his original thought.

“I shall be delighted to stop,” he said, “if Lady Maud does not mind my being on her hands a few minutes. I wanted so much to ask about one or two of the pools on the river.”

He sat down again as Thurso went out, and turned to her with the same eagerness as he had shown a minute ago.

“I don’t ever want to preach,” he said, “but I love to practise. I didn’t know whether your brother would like my suggesting it, though.”

Somehow Maud froze into herself a little at that. The idea of Mr. Cochran’s “treating” Thurso for his neuralgia was somehow out of the question. She would not think of such a thing, she felt sure, too, it was idle to ask him.

“ Oh, thank you very much,” she said, “ but his medicine always puts him right,” and she began at once, as he had suggested, to speak about the river and certain pools which he found difficulty in fishing satisfactorily.

Thurso meantime had almost run to his room, for he longed for the relief that he knew awaited him there as the desert-parched traveller longs for water. He longed, too, and much more keenly, for the tingling ecstatic sense of well-being that the laudanum produced. All day, even before this racking headache came on, he had been almost unable to think of anything but that. All day he had thirsted, even when he definitely rejected the idea of taking it, for that stimulated consciousness, that huge vivid sense of happiness, which already seemed to him the proper normal level of life. Already, too, he was beginning to be dishonest with himself, just as yesterday he had been dishonest with Maud; and even as he took it he told himself that he would not have done so had not Mr. Cochran been dining with them. It was impossible to send him away five minutes after dinner: it was equally impossible that he should spend the evening alone with Maud. And though that was true, it was not the essential truth.

He took the glass in his hand, wishing, now that relief was so near, even as the caged beast

that has been roaring for its food sits snarling when it has it, before it begins to assuage its hunger-pangs, to prolong for a moment more this stabbing pain, and the anticipation of its ceasing, and he sat down in an easy-chair, putting up his feet on another, to make himself quite comfortable, before he drank it. His room looked northwest, and though it was nearly nine o'clock, the sun in this northern latitude still shone in at his window, bathing him in its crystal light. Then he drank.

Inside his head during this last hour he felt as if a sort of piston-rod had been making regular firm strokes on to some bleeding mangled nerve. The end of the piston rod was sometimes fitted with a blunt hammer, so that it squashed the seat of pain, sometimes with a sharp needle-point that went deeper and seemed to penetrate and reach the very centre of his being. Then perhaps the piston-rod would cease for awhile, and an iron-toothed rusty rake collected the smashed fragments of nerve together again, so that the hammer should not leave any of the scattered pieces unpulverized, and the rake made a neat pile of the raw tortured bits, so that they might receive the blows of the blunt hammer again. This raking back (the image was so vivid to him that he almost believed it actually occurred) was about the worst part: he knew that the steady squash-

ing hammer was coming on again. But now, a few minutes only after he had taken his dose, though the hammer did not cease to fall, its blows ceased to produce pain; they produced instead a warm, tingling sensation like that which one feels when one spreads out icy fingers to a friendly blaze. And that tingling warmth spread slowly through his head, passed down his neck, and flooded his body and limbs to toe and finger-tip. He forgot what pain meant, knowing only what the oncoming of this absolute physical bliss was like. The sun that still shone in at his windows burned with a ruddier and more vivid light, the glory of it was soft but incredibly brilliant, and to his quickened sense of smell the air that came in through the open windows was redolent with the honey-scent of warm heather. The blind had been a little drawn down over the top of the window—the tap of it flapping against the jamb—but whereas, when he was dressing for dinner an hour ago it was a fretting and irritating thing, it now seemed to him to give out flute-like vibrating notes. The present moment, his own sensations were all quickened to the vividness of dream-life, while it was but vaguely that he remembered that downstairs Maud was sitting with a very pleasant American fellow who had come to dinner; but with the gates of Paradise here upstairs flung wide to receive him he could not fix his

mind on him sufficiently to recall much about him. No doubt if he made an effort he could remember what he was like and what his name was, but an effort was the one thing he certainly would not make, since it might destroy or disturb this perfect equilibrium on which he was balanced. Besides, there was really no reason, so it now appeared, why he should go downstairs. Maud and her friend would talk about fishing for awhile and then he—ah, yes, Walter Cochran—would go away. They would both easily understand his non-appearance. He had suffered tortures; it was absurd not to grant him this little compensation.

Then for a moment the habit and breeding of his whole life jerked him to his feet, in order to rejoin them. But the drug he had taken was more powerful than they: it told him that this ecstasy of consciousness would be trespassed on and interfered with by the presence of others. He would have, to some extent, to attend to them instead of being absorbed in the exquisiteness of his own sensations. And those sensations had nothing whatever in common with either sleep or intoxication: he was lifted on to a higher level of perception than the normal: he basked in super-solar sunlight.

Then, still without any hint of sleepiness or loss of consciousness, the most wonderful visions,

or rather the intentional visualization of magically beautiful scenes, passed in front of him. He, like Keats, was listening to the nightingale, and losing himself in "embalmed darkness" to the music of the song, while all the "weariness, the fever and the fret" were remembered only as the traveller arrived at his long-sought home remembers the weariness of the way. He mounted higher than the blithe spirit of the lark could carry him, and hung in ether so remote that the sun above him and the earth below seemed of about equal size, and the shape of England and the coasts of Europe appeared set in dim sea as in an atlas. Then he turned his eyes away from the earth and looked unblinded into the high noon of the heavens; and yet, though it was noon, the infinite vault of blue was sown with stars. Sun and stars shone there together, and a slip of crescent moon floated very near at hand.

Again, still vividly awake and without the least hint of drowsiness, the stars became globules of sparkling dew, and the spaces of ether took shape, until about him that which had been the heavens was transformed into a huge bed of blue acanthus leaves on which the dew of stars was sparkling. The sun was still there, and round it the sky took the shape of petals of a flower, and it, as Browning had said, was the

“centre spike of gold” in an immense blue blossom. All this, too, this vision to which sun and stars contributed, was his own, born of the brain which so short a time ago had been stabbed and pierced with horrible tortures. But, indeed, that torture was worth experiencing, if by the aid of a little brown draught he reaped this great compensation. The machinery of the universe was subservient to his brain now, the stars made drops of dew on the acanthus leaves of infinite space, and the sun burned as the centre of one unique flower. A few minutes ago he had half-started to go downstairs: now the ravings of some lunatic in bedlam were not more distant from his mind than that thought. He was lost in the contemplation of things as the mind of man can make them. This was the real world, a world so easily entered, while the material world was a vague, pale dream compared to this vivid waking reality.

Meanwhile, below, Walter Cochran and Maud had for ten minutes talked unmitigated fishing; but Maud, though to talk fishing was in the general way one of the most enthralling methods of conversation, was giving lip-service only, for inwardly she regretted the finality of those few little frozen words about Thurso with which she had so effectually dismissed the subject of Chris-

tian Science and all they had talked about by the river. For very shame or pride—the two so verbally opposed are often really identical—she could not go back again to the subject she had so unmistakably snuffed out, while he, in his confessed dislike of preaching, was equally unlikely to lead the subject back again. But he had said that though he disliked preaching, he loved practice, and she had leaned forward over the table, her pride in her pocket, to ask a question about this, when an interruption came: one of the nurses entered.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, my lady,” she said, “but I am sure Dr. Symes ought to be sent for. Sandy Mackenzie had high fever an hour ago, but I didn’t like his looks, and I have just taken his temperature again. It is below normal, and that is the worst that can happen, suddenly like this. Dr. Symes ought to be sent for immediately, and I didn’t know who to apply to.”

Maud got up.

“You did quite right to come to me, nurse,” she said. “I will send for him at once. It is very serious.”

“Yes, my lady, it means perforation,” she said.

Maud nodded.

“I will do everything,” she said. “Thank you, nurse.”

The nurse left the room, but Maud did not move at once, for all that she had mused about by the river yesterday came back to her mind with the vividness and instantaneousness of lightning. Only yesterday she had heard Mr. Cochran tell Duncan that his wife was better, and though she had been ill almost beyond hope of recovery, yet all that day and all to-day she had swiftly and steadily been mending. Thurso was upstairs, too: the opportunity she had desired was completely given her. And half-way across the room to the bell she stopped. It seemed almost as if Mr. Cochran had expected this, for he had wheeled round in his chair, and when she stopped he was facing her, quiet, cheerful, with those strong, childlike eyes.

“ Mr. Cochran,” she began.

She took a step closer to him.

“ I don’t know whether I am right to ask you this,” she said, “ but, to begin with, if it is what the nurse thinks, it is quite useless to send for Dr. Symes. But I don’t ask you in the spirit of derision or of curiosity, for a life is at stake. Will you go to poor Sandy and make him well? If you say ‘ no,’ I shall quite understand that you feel, somehow, honestly I am sure, that it is not right for you to do so. But I ask you! ”

“ Why, certainly I will,” he said. “ But if I am to make him better, you mustn’t, while I am

doing so, whether you think he is coming round or not, send for the doctor. There must be none of that. I will go to him if you wish, but then the case is in my hands: ah, not mine, but in the hands of Divine Love. It may take some hours; I don't yet know how far he has encouraged error, how thick a darkness he has made round him. But if you ask me to make him well, believing that I can, I will do so. But you must trust me completely. You mustn't ask it only to see if I can."

Maud went through a long moment of dreadful indecision. She knew she was taking an awful responsibility on herself, for though, if the nurse was right, Sandy was beyond human power, yet it was a serious thing she was doing. And as she hesitated he spoke again, still quite quietly, quite cheerfully.

"Don't hesitate," he said. "Your choice is quite simple. You choose the direct power of God to make Sandy well, or you reject it. Don't think for a moment that it is I who can make him well. By myself I can do as little as the doctor. So choose, Lady Maud."

She hesitated no longer.

"Please go to him," she said, "and, oh, be quick."

The human cry sounded there: she was terrified at her choice. And this stranger, whom she

had seen yesterday for the first time, soothed her like a child.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said. “You have chosen rightly, of course, but I know the flesh is weak. Or rather our faith is weak, while our flesh is strong; it binds and controls one against one’s true will. Let me be silent a minute.”

He moved his chair round again to the table where they had dined, made a backward sweep of his hand, to clear a small space, and leaned his head on his hands, clasping his fingers over his eyes to shut out all material things, and brought his whole mind home to the one great fact that he believed, the Presence, the Omnipotence, the love of God. From fishing, from all the ordinary preoccupation of life, from Thurso, from Maud herself, he called his winged thoughts home, and they settled in his soul like homing doves. For a minute or two he remained motionless. Then he got up, and his face, ordinarily so cheerful and content, was brimming over with happiness so that he almost laughed.

“Come up with me, Lady Maud,” he said, “since you have asked me this in sincerity. I should like you to see it since you are ready to believe. Like the Israelites you shall stand still and see the salvation of God.”

Maud did not hesitate now.

“Yes, I will come,” she said.

The whole house, except the few rooms which Thurso and she and their few servants used, had been transformed into an hospital, and Sandy's bed was in the little serving-room outside the dining-room. There was space there for only one bed, and the two under guidance of the nurse passed through into it. Then Mr. Cochran turned to her.

"We will be alone here, Lady Maud and I," he said. "Thank you so much for showing us."

She went out again into the big dining-room, where some twenty beds had been put. Lady Maud had said she would make all arrangements for sending for Dr. Symes, and till he came nothing could be done for Sandy, while there was busy occupation for her all night long probably with her other patients. She wondered for a moment who this strong, cheerful young man was, who had said with such assurance that he and Lady Maud would be alone with Sandy, that it never entered her head to question it: she wondered also, though again only momentarily, why Lady Maud had come up with him. Then since her hands were full with the needs of her other patients, she dismissed the thought of Sandy until the doctor's arrival.

Maud had never yet in her life seen any to

whom that great " White Presence " which we call Death has drawn near, but now when she looked at this bed and the face of the man who lay in it she knew that the supreme moment was nearly come. Sandy, the gillie, she had known so well, with whom she had passed so many sunny and pleasant days on the moor or by the river, was barely recognizable: a white pallid mask with skin drawn tight over the bones of the face so that it was scarcely human, was all that was left of him. Both upper and lower lips, already growing bluish in tinge, were drawn back so that in both jaws his teeth were exposed, and his eyes, bright and dry, looked piteously this way and that, and the soul, frightened at this dark and lonely journey on which none could be its companion, sought for comfort and reassurement, but found them not. It was not the delirium of fever that made those eyes so bright; it was fear and dumb appeal. His hands, thin and white, lay outside the coverlet, and they, too, were active, picking at it.

Cochran had seen that before and knew what it meant, and he quickly pulled a chair close to the bedside, leaving Maud standing.

Maud looked from that mask on the pillow to the man who sat by the bed, and if the one face was dark with the shadow of death that already lay over it, the other was all lit and illumined with life and the thought that inspired the words.



"You are better already, you know, Sandy," he said. Chapter III.

Yet though the evening was cool the beads of perspiration already stood on his forehead. Then Cochran closed his eyes from the glassy, tortured face of his patient and said quietly and earnestly, "God loves you and will heal you, Sandy, do not fear. He is the strength and the rock of your defence *now*. You do not need to suffer." Then sitting down he began his silent prayer. Without once raising his eyes for nearly an hour, Cochran knew silently and confidently that Life is God and cannot be destroyed.

Sandy soon began to sleep in a quiet, gentle way, and after watching him for a few minutes in silence, Cochran slowly repeated the 91st psalm aloud.

To Maud this new understanding of God and Life filled her with surprise and wonderment. As she watched Sandy pass from his delirium into a sweet sleep, hope filled her with the buoyant thought that this prayer was being answered *now*, and that the last enemy had been met and destroyed.

Cochran got up without another word, and in silence they left the room. At the door Maud looked back. Sandy was lying quite quiet with closed eyes and mouth just slightly parted.

The nurse was moving about from bed to bed in the big ward, and as they went through Maud stopped to speak to her.

“Sandy is ever so much better,” she said. “He has gone to sleep, I think. You won’t disturb him again to-night, will you?”

“Not till Dr. Symes comes, my lady,” she said, “if he keeps quiet. There is nothing to be done by disturbing him.”

Cochran was standing by, and it seemed to Maud as if it was her duty to bear witness here and now to what she had seen, to what she believed.

“There is no need for Dr. Symes to come at all,” she said. “Sandy is getting well. I have not sent for him, and I shall not.”

The nurse stared at her a moment in silence, then went swiftly to the door of the room where Sandy lay, opened it and looked in. After a moment she came out again, and closed it softly behind her.

“Why, he’s getting some natural sleep!” she said, “and he hasn’t slept for the last three nights. Of course, I won’t disturb him. Yet his temperature came down to below normal from high fever in a couple of hours. Or could I have made a mistake?”

Cochran smiled at her.

“Yes, nurse, I think there has been a mistake somewhere,” he said, “but it is all right now, isn’t it? Good-night. Sandy won’t wake for twelve hours or more, I think.”

The two went downstairs again. Thurso was still up in his bedroom, and they stood for a long moment in silence. Then Maud suddenly looked up at Cochran.

“ I don’t understand,” she said.

“ You did just now,” he said, “ when you told Sandy the Truth was making him well. It’s just the simplest and truest thing in the world. But I’ll go now, Lady Maud. I’ve—I’ve got more to do.”

Maud felt fearfully excited: all her emotions, all her beliefs and aspirations, had been strung up to their highest by what she had seen. Nothing seemed to her impossible at the moment.

“ Ah, make them all well,” she cried. “ Stop this dreadful false idea of suffering and illness, since you say it is false.”

He made a gesture of dissent which she understood.

“ No, I don’t mean that you can stop it yourself,” she said, “ but, oh, can’t you get God to make them all know what Sandy knows now? ”

He put out his hand to her.

“ Don’t you think that He is doing that? ” he asked. “ You see there has been no fresh case for two days.”

“ You mean it is stopping? ” she asked.

“ Oh, yes, of course it is!—Good-night, Lady Maud.”

CHAPTER IV

It was June, but no Londoner could possibly have guessed it, because instead of the temperature being absolutely arctic, it was extremely warm, a condition of things which we do not in England associate with June.

The haze of heat which made a plum of Piccadilly, which the London County Council, after their instructive visit to Paris, had widened at least six inches, at enormous expense, dealed still more magically, having better material to work upon, with St. James's Park, as seen from the windows of Thurso House, and also with Thurso House and its windows as seen from St. James's. For it was a house that looked as if it had been taken straight off the Grand Canal at Venice, with its stately white walls, its rows of long windows and its noble proportions. In front of the dining-room a huge terrace built above the offices thrust out its broad, square front on to the edge of the Park itself, so that the roadway of the Mall was invisible to anybody sitting underneath the big awnings that flapped gently in the warm wind, and the eye looked straight across to the hazy green of the grass and trees and the shim-

mering surface of the lake, where ridiculous pelicans and sea-gulls bickered and screeched over the fragments of bread and biscuit thrown them by the animal-loving Londoner as he passed over the bridge from and toward Queen Anne's Gate. On the other side, the dining-room and the big drawing-room above it looked out over the private gardens, and beyond a screen of lilacs, over the Green Park, so that the house was planted, even though the whole metropolis hummed and clattered round it, in the centre of green and growing things.

The dining-room was at the corner of the house commanding both parks, and to-day the windows were open on both sides, so that the lace curtains swayed and bulged in the wind, while the bourdon note of the busy sunny town came in like the sound of great bees burrowing in golden flowers. The room itself was parquettèd in oak and walnut, and was left bare, as befitted these summer months, except for some half-dozen of silk Persian rugs that made shimmering islands on the sea of its shining surface. The two walls which faced the Park were, to tell the truth, rather window than wall, and eight lights on the longer wall and four on the shorter made other adornment, except for the brocaded curtains looped back to allow the greatest manageable ingress of light and air, impossible, but the other two walls

glowed with the portraits of bygone Strattons. The first Marquis of Thurso was there, a portrait in peer's robes by Reynolds, who also had done the picture of his wife and the great family group of them with their two young sons that hung over the Italian chimney-piece; the second Marquis, the eldest boy in the family group, was there, too, grown to man's estate and painted by Gainsborough; the picture of his wife was a Romney, while Lawrence was the artist for the third generation. Then after a long gap of years came the present Thurso and his wife, two brilliant canvases claiming kinship by right of their exquisite art with the earlier portraits.

Otherwise, for nothing could spoil these glorious decorations of the walls, or the more smouldering brilliance of the moulded ceiling, the room did not at this moment appear to advantage, for its floor was occupied by a multitude of small round tables in preparation for the ball that was to take place to-night, and at the end in front of the chimney-piece was a long, narrow table for the very elect. These were to be very elect, indeed, and heaps of stars and garters and ambassadors would not find a place there to-night, but be relegated to round tables. In any case, however, everybody was going to have proper things to eat and drink, which should be presented to

their notice in decent fashion. There was to be no buffet supper, where, as at a railway station, Lady Thurso's guests would scramble for sandwiches and pale yellow drinks with mint and anise and cummin floating about in them, among footmen who jogged their elbows with plates of strawberries, while the elect, Olympian-wise, refreshed themselves behind closed doors. To-night, in fact, Thurso House was to be reopened with a proper regard for its stateliness and the huge hospitality that it ought to exercise, after a period, so to speak, of ten lean years in which the late lord had lived alone here with half the rooms closed, a secret and eccentric life. He had not even been wicked, and held infamous revels here; he had only been morose and shut himself up miser-like, and not entertained anybody. He had died just a year ago, and to-night the house was going to be re-launched. Lady Thurso would almost have liked to re-christen it, too; it was associated in her mind, and in the mind of everybody else, with such a very disagreeable old gentleman.

But Lady Thurso, during these ten lean years in which she and her husband had "pigged along," as she expressed it, in a pokey little house in Grosvenor Square, owing to the tightness of the purse-strings, had been far from idle.

in her preparation for the time when she would be installed here. No one had a greater contempt than she for the modern hostess who makes use of her time and money only to give expensive entertainments and to appear at them when they are given by her friends. She had seen during these ten years the invasion of London by those whose sole invasive power was money and their willingness to spend it to any extent in order to be considered what is called "smart," and she entirely disagreed with those conservative and old-fashioned moralists who shook their heads over the capitulation of London to the almighty dollar. London—all London that was worth anything, that is to say—had not in the least capitulated to the almighty dollar, and those—there were many of them—who thought that they were making a great splash in the world merely because they were rich and willing to spend their money on bands, prima donnas, and things to eat and drink, made a great mistake. They never got anywhere really: they never got *intime* with the society they coveted. They thought they were founding centres of smartness. As a matter of fact, they were only turning their houses into free restaurants for the wealthy unemployed, to which, with ordinary common-sense, the world went to be fed. There were, of course, others, who had something else to back their

spending capacity, people who were witty, agreeable, with the power to charm. Certainly their wealth helped such of those who yearned for social success, but it was not their wealth that made it for them, but their wit. People would always come to be fed, if the food was decent: then they "wiped their mouths and went their journey," while their poor, self-deceived hostesses thought that they were going hand after hand up the ladder. Lily Thurso—being by birth half American—was a compatriot of many of these, and her pretty little nose, slightly tip-tilted, instinctively went in the air when she thought of them. You could not get on or really become of any importance merely by spending money. In New York you could, and her compatriots she thought lacked a proper sense of moral geography. Wealth in London brought to your house the Hon. Mrs. Not-quite-in-it, in shoals, but that was all. Or if you flew a little higher in the way of mere intelligence, eatable dinners would bring to your house the keepers of the smaller national collections, plump little gentlemen, for the most part, of harmless but insignificant nature, who seethed with second-rate and unreliable information both about the world and about their art, and discovered second-rate Titians and things. All that was second-rate, in

fact, could easily be secured by money, but nothing else.

At this moment she was sitting with Jim Stratton, her husband's younger brother, and Ruby Majendie, who, she hoped, was going to persuade Jim to marry her, for the sake of the happiness of them both, having lunch at one of those little round tables, in order to see how the room looked, and that while they ate, since hours were precious, Ruby and she could direct the efforts of those who were putting down carpets, bringing in flowers, and decorating tables. Lady Thurso had just given orders that all the hydrangeas, of which a perfect copse had been made at the far end of the room, should be taken away again, for really the Italian fireplace was much more decorative than these blue-blossomed shrubs.

"Besides, hydrangeas always remind me of Mr. Turner James," she said in parenthesis.

"And what's that?" asked Jim.

"Oh, it's a little art gentleman; of course you know him, because he is always the one person there when one lunches or dines out whom one doesn't know. He looks as if he was grown in a pot in a moderately warm hothouse. I don't know why I thought of him at this moment—oh, yes, because of the hydrangeas. You know when hydrangeas begin to get stout— Yes, take them

all away," she called out to the florist, who still appeared to want to leave the " choicest " in the grate.

The " choicest " were therefore removed also, and while this was being done, they could talk of other things.

Lady Thurso, inheriting the American love of doing something which had never been done before, a thing which leads to failure in a dozen cases and to brilliant success in the lucky thirteenth, had never been better inspired, for the staircase, otherwise a rather heavy and not very admirable feature in the house, had been gloriously transformed by this feathery and rustic decoration. But poor Mr. Hopkinson's ignorance of what wild flowers were, had been capped by his ignorance of how wild flowers grew, and he had begun to arrange the poor dears in neat rows, as in a riband bed. Consequently he and his assistant florists had, about twelve thirty that day, to begin all over again, and under Lady Thurso's direct and mordant supervision, had first " made a salad " of these fragrant hampers of flowers and grasses, and then stuck them properly, that is to say, at random, into the trays of moist clay that lined each side of the stairway, and would keep them alive and bright-eyed till morning. And as soon as lunch was over, she went out to see if poor Mr. Hopkinson had at length under-

stood. He had: the staircase was a country lane, exactly as she had visualized it. And somehow with this adaptability that was as natural to her as the change of color is to the chameleon, as she stood below a clump of flowering hawthorn, she looked, for all her "air of the world" and exquisite rose-colored dress, like some visionary milkmaid. But the milkmaid had the critical eye, and she looked very slowly and carefully up and down this delicious hayfield vista.

"More buttercups there," she said, pointing to the place, "and one big bough of hawthorn at that corner."

She waited, sitting down on the top step with Ruby till this was done. Then eagerly, though carefully, she looked at it again.

"Yes, that will do," she said. "But I only hope it won't give Thurso hay-fever. He and I will have to stand at the top of the stairs till the royal quadrille. He and Maud get here this afternoon."

"And the typhoid?" asked Ruby.

"All this last week there has been no further case," said she, "so I hope it is really all over. I want Thurso to be in town a bit before the end of the season, otherwise— I only heard from Maud: she wrote chiefly about a Mr. Cochran, to whom Thurso let the fishing. He is a Christian Scientist, and she said she saw him cure a bad

case. It sounds interesting, and Maud never exaggerates. I think I shall go in for Christian Science next August."

"Why August?"

"Because I haven't got time in July, dear. Oh, yes, Maud did not know that the fishing was let—so like Thurso not to tell her!—and was caught by this Mr. Cochran poaching on his river. He wasn't annoyed, it appears. Do you think I should never be annoyed if I became a Christian Scientist?"

"I can't say; but I hope you wouldn't get the Christian Science smile. It is particularly fatiguing to look at. Alice Yardly has it: that is why I can't look at her."

Lady Thurso was still not quite satisfied with her staircase, or, at any rate, she wanted to be sure that she was. So she paused a moment, with her head on one side.

"Oh, be just, Ruby," she said. "Dear Alice was always fatiguing, and I don't know that the fact that she is a Christian Scientist now makes her more fatiguing. It is true that she seems to smile with a purpose, but, if we didn't know, I don't think we should see any difference. She means to be helpful now, but she is about as helpless as before. I think you are uncharitable. Of course nobody really can help one: one can only help oneself. Well, I must go. I think it is

too charming of you to stay and superintend these stupid people. You won't let them touch the staircase again, will you? It is just what I meant it to be, or so nearly so that one is content to run no further risks. And please throw all gardenias out of the window if they bring any, just as you threw all the calceolarias out. They are what is called so 'powerful.' What a divine expression! I'm sure somebody in Birmingham must have invented it. It is like talking of a carriage-sweep or a soiled handkerchief."

Lady Thurso would probably have been very much surprised if she had been told that she was a genius, because she had a sort of idea that in order to be, or rather have been, a genius, it was necessary to live a most unsuccessful life, and to die unnoticed (until afterward, when it was too late) in a garret. But if the stock definition of genius was at all correct, she had a very reasonable claim to the title, for her power of taking pains was really infinite. It made no matter what she was engaged on; whatever she did, she did with a transcendent aim for perfection, and whether it was the decoration of her staircase or the speech that she had to make at the Industrial Sale, she bestowed on it the utmost effort of which she was capable. She had another gift also to cap this, which, though almost as rare, is almost

as remunerative: for when she had bestowed her utmost pains, she could dismiss the subject from her mind, and not worry any more at all about it. Thus now, the moment that she had left her door, the staircase decoration ceased to exist in her mind, and the speech she was to make in a quarter of an hour from now was non-existent also, since this morning she had thought it over, written it down, and said it aloud to herself until she was perfectly satisfied that she knew what she wanted to say and could say it. This being so, she could and did devote herself as she drove through this blue June of London to the fascinating pursuit of simply looking about her. She was the author, in point of fact, of a *mot* that had gone all round London, to the effect that by driving for an hour during the day, at the right time and through the right streets, you could, without exchanging a word with anybody, know all that had been in the morning papers and all that would be in the evening issues. In the course of such a drive you could see the leader of what had been the Opposition and was now the Government stepping into a hansom with an elate but anxious face at his door in Belgrave Square. The hansom meant a sudden emergency, and surely the goal was Buckingham Palace, and so the new Prime Minister was foreseen. Again in Chesham Place you could see the Russian ambas-

sador stepping into his motor, with luggage on the top. Clearly, then, there was some amelioration in Russian affairs, since he could not leave town if the crisis was as critical as it had been yesterday. The blinds were down where A was very ill, the blinds were still up where B was supposed to be dying. Therefore A had thought worse of it and died; B had thought better of it and still lived. Then there was a block at Hyde Park corner, and the royal liveries flashed by. She wondered if the new Prime Minister would get to the Palace first.

For the last two years or so she and her husband had been very little together, though they both had the sense to avoid the possibility of scandal in their being so much apart, for his short and bitter summary of their mutual relations had been very near the truth: he bored her, and she got on his nerves. And whatever the higher code of ethics might have to say on the subject, she felt convinced that common-sense indorsed the policy that they both pursued, in that they saw very little of each other. Never had she admitted, either by direct word or by unspoken implication, that he bored her, and, to do him justice, never had he admitted except to Maud the incompatibility of their matrimonial association. If idle and stupid tongues wagged about them—she had no reason to suppose that they did—that was only the con-

cern of the idle and stupid, who might say what they pleased. It could not concern any one vitally constituted what suburban minds said to each other when they met, so to speak, in semi-detached villas. Much as she valued the world, there were portions of it that she valued not at all, and if the fact that she and Thurso were seldom together concerned anybody, it only concerned people who were entirely negligible. Remarks dropped from the garret into the gutter could only hurt those who happened to be sitting in the gutter. What really mattered was his comparative happiness and hers. She did not want to be bored, he did not want his nerves set on edge by her. She realized his side of the question quite as keenly as she realized her own, nor did she blame him because he bored her, any more than she blamed herself because she made him, as he would have expressed it, "jumpy."

Any one as efficient as Lady Thurso certainly was has to march through life without impendimenta, and all emotional luggage which is not likely to "come in" must be firmly thrown away. She had long ago realized this and had always acted on it, so that it was more from force of habit rather than by any conscious effort that she eliminated from her mind any emotion that was likely to clog or hinder her energies. Worry, sorrow,

regret for what was irremediable, she simply threw away, as one throws the envelopes of opened letters into the waste-paper basket. They were of no earthly use, and you did not want the drawers and compartments in your brain crammed with rubbish like this. Thus it was but very seldom that she let her thoughts dwell on the one great thing that she had lacked all her life. She had never loved. Her marriage with Thurso had been an excellent, sensible arrangement, and she had done as she was told and had accepted him. Even as a girl she had wanted the sort of position and opportunity that such a marriage gave her, and she had made the most splendid success of it. She had done her duty, too, as a wife, had given him two sons, and filled her place superbly. But love had never really come to her; that, by no fault of hers, had apparently been left out of her emotional possibilities, and since she was convinced that that omission was not her fault, she did not worry about it. But to-day, though she did not worry, she could not help wondering about a certain time long past in her life. It was conceivable that that time long past would begin to be a factor of her life in the immediate future, and as such it occupied her to-day, now that the staircase and her speech at the Industrial Sale were off her mind, somewhat insistently. There was no mystery about it all, and

nothing whatever to fear either in the past or the future. But certain dim possibilities interested her.

Count Villars had just arrived in England, having at an extraordinarily early age, for he could not yet be forty, been appointed Hungarian ambassador to the Court of St. James; and there were quite a number of people resident in that parish who remembered very distinctly how desperately he had fallen in love with Lady Thurso twelve years ago, when she had first come out, and, as her mother expressed it, taken "the shine" out of the rest of the girls of the year. Then, so the world still remembered, rather perplexing events had happened in rapid succession. Her engagement to Count Villars had been announced, but hardly had that happened when it was contradicted, young Villars, then a junior secretary in the embassy of which he was now the head, had been transferred elsewhere, and immediately afterward Lily Etheridge's engagement to her present husband took place, and was followed before the year was out by her marriage. For Mrs. Etheridge had always meant that her daughter should marry Lord Stratton, as he then was, and if anybody thought that her plans were going to be interfered with by any volcanic young Austrian, however brilliant or handsome, who had not a penny of his own, and was half a dozen

lives removed from the ownership of Villars (those lives certainly made a lot of difference), she would show him his mistake. There were, in fact, many who thought so, but their mistake had duly been demonstrated to them when Lily Etheridge so soon after became Lady Stratton. It had been supposed, however, that Mrs. Etheridge had experienced a certain difficulty in showing her daughter her mistake in believing that she, having actually told Rudolf Villars that she would marry him, was going to do so, but that, too, had been done.

Rudolf Villars, in this long interval of twelve years, had done everything except marry, and Fortune had clearly declared herself to be his parent. His brilliant gifts had reaped their reward, relations neither near nor dead had died, and while not yet forty he was next in succession to the large principality of Villars, and ambassador to the English Court. To the world at large the situation which just now was rather largely discussed had elements of interest; it was known of course that Lily Thurso and her husband were not romantically attached to each other; it was conjectured that since Count Villars had remained single he was still romantically attached to her, and it was impossible not to help wondering whether at last Lady Thurso would show signs of being attached to anybody. To the world she

was, in one aspect, in spite of her *cachet*, her brilliance, her charm, a somewhat irritating enigma. All that queenliness of beauty belonged to nobody; she did not care for her husband, but she cared for nobody else. And so many men had been wildly devoted to her, and none had had a single particle of success. She was not shocked at their declarations of love: had she been shocked her attitude would at any rate have been a moral and an intelligible one. But she merely laughed at them, and told them not to be silly. If they persisted she yawned. She forgot all about it, too, a week afterward, even if they had made her yawn very much, asked them to the house just as usual, and was as friendly as possible.

Lily Thurso, as will have been gathered, did her duty in the state of life to which her mother, in the main, had called her, with extraordinary fulness. She had grasped as soon as she married almost the sort of life that her position entailed if she was to fill it adequately and with any credit to herself, and with all her splendid energies of body and mind, she lived up to a really high ideal of it. Her time, her talents, her money, were always at the service of any scheme which she believed to be one which should be supported by those in her position, and she brought to the task not the bare sense of duty only, but a most warm-hearted kindness. The sense of duty

alone is a barren road to tread, but her kindness, her interest in those who were in need, made it for her to break out into flowers. She genuinely cared for the causes to which she so devoted herself; she wanted everybody to have a good time, and she knew that it was her own tireless efforts that gave her a good time herself. But this kindness which pervaded her nature was the highest motive she knew: she did everything warmly but nothing passionately, because it seemed as if passion had been left out of her nature. Yet sometimes, as this afternoon, she wondered whether that was absolutely the case: for though she had certainly not felt passion in all the years of her married life, she still remembered that blissful perplexity, which was half-bliss, half-unhappiness, which she had known in those few months which had culminated in her promise to marry Rudolf Villars. Whatever that feeling was, it had been a bud only, and had never expanded into a flower, for swift maternal hands had, without any figure of speech, nipped it off. She had been called a sentimental school-girl with such assurance that it had convinced her for the time being. But to-day, when she knew that this evening the man who had at any rate roused in her the sentimentality of a school-girl would after this long lapse of years come to her house again, she wondered (though this was useless emotional

baggage) what she would feel. She had not seen him since; probably he was rather bald, rather stout, rather of the diplomatist type which seemed to her to be causelessly self-important. Very likely, when his name was announced, she would shake hands with a stranger. She almost hoped that this would prove to be so. For she did not want to feel again that trembling uncertainty, that sense of unknown possibilities of overmastering emotion, that she had felt twelve years ago. Her life was very full, she enjoyed it enormously, she was happy, she was nearly content. And she did not, as far as she knew herself, wish to risk terrible agitation and upheaval in order to be possibly quite content. She had seen love, in fact, like distant lightning on the horizon: she did not want the thunder-storm to come closer.

Yet, yet . . . already in her summer of life, she sometimes asked herself, "Is this all?" It seemed a sorry comedy: to be gifted with so much and to be able to realize so little was a poor task for the appointed threescore years and ten of life. If she had been really tempted to be what moralists called wicked, that would have been something, but she knew quite clearly and calmly that she had never been tempted like that. Frankly, she did not believe in God, in a huge central force that was utterly good, and that being denied her, she felt sometimes that it would have

been some consolation to believe in the Devil. But she did not believe in him either; the fascination of sin had as little existence for her as the fascination of holiness. She was a strong, healthy woman, with many opportunities for doing good, of which she availed herself nobly, being of a most kindly nature, and of the many opportunities that she also had of being wicked she did not avail herself, because she did not care sufficiently. Morality had perhaps no existence for her, and she was absolutely moral in thought and action merely because she had no temptation to be otherwise. To her, as a married woman, it seemed rather bad form to have a lover. It was not dignified: you had to play a part. But she realized that if only she cared for any of those men who certainly "cared" for her, no moral code would have stood in the way of her doing what she wanted. But she did not want: and she wondered whether the failure to want was strength or weakness.

The Industrial Sale went off with the success that always attended any scheme that she took up, and an hour after she had opened it most of the stalls were nearly empty, though the prices charged and paid for the objects sold were of the most fancy order. She herself had, after she had made the opening speech, sold stockings, nothing

but stockings, and all male London, it appeared, had been in want of stockings. They had been frightfully expensive, but the sense of her own cheapness in making them so was counteracted by the knowledge of the good cause. Irish peasants had made them, and she willingly lent her position and her place in order that Irish peasants might reap the benefits of what was adventitiously hers. She was sorry for people who had to live like that: she willingly gave her time, her energy, even her sense of "cheapness," to help them. But before her stall was empty she had seen somebody in the crowd whom she recognized, though she had not seen him for so long. He was neither bald nor stout; he was as she remembered him. And again the distant lightning flickered on the horizon.

Apparently, though he had only arrived in England two or three days ago, he had more than two or three friends here, and for half an hour after she had seen him first he was occupied with hand-shakes and recognition-speeches. Then, after her stall, which had been besieged by buyers, was bare, he passed and caught her eye.

"Ah, Lady Thurso," he said, in the accurate foreign speech which she found now that she remembered so well, "a thousand greetings. I tried to get near your stall, but it was impossible. And one never wastes time in attempting the im-

possible. But now you have nothing that I can buy; so I, as a purchaser, am impossible, too!"

She tried to say something natural: and since the attempt to say something natural failed, she was natural without trying.

"Yes, here I am," she said, "but I have sold everything. You are too late."

"I was too early once," he said.

She who was generally so apt of speech, so quick to take up a point, or drop it for another, so as to avoid any pause, which she always said was an insult to the person you were talking to, as well as a dismal comment on the quality of your own intelligence, let a perceptible pause ensue. For as she stood there, in one moment twelve years had been wiped out of her life, some thrill, some nameless bitter-sweet agitation, again like the distant lightning flickered through her. She was no stranger to that feeling; she had felt it before. But for the moment—infinitesimal in duration—it tied her tongue: it was like some tune that we have heard in childhood, and suddenly hear again, so that we must pause and say to ourselves, "Ah, what is that?"

Then she recovered herself partly.

"That is the diplomatist's duty, is it not," she said, "always to be a little earlier than other people?"

She pulled herself together again, determining on her attitude toward him.

“ And your excellency is coming to our dance to-night, are you not? ” she said.

A faint smile quivered for a moment on his mouth, and showed itself in his dark eyes.

“ Yes, my lady,” he said.

CHAPTER V

THE epidemic of typhoid which had been so violent had ceased like one of Thurso's headaches; it was as if a tap had been turned off, and after the ball he had dropped no word to indicate that he intended to go North again. This quite fell in with his wife's desires, for she wished him for many reasons to be in London and with her for a time, and since the night of the ball an extra reason had been added, namely, that she knew that people were "wondering" about herself and Count Villars. The memory of the world generally is very short: the events of one week are quite sufficient to put out of its head those of the week before, but when it does happen really to remember a thing its memory has the tiresome tenaciousness of a child's. You may change the subject, you may point to bright objects, you may rattle with toys, but the world, like the child, though it may be distracted for the moment, gets a glassy eye again and says, "But what about?" The world was doing it now, and she felt that Thurso's presence gave a better chance of distracting the world again than any bright objects she might dangle before it. The ball had been

a very bright object indeed; it differed somehow in kind from other functions. Other functions might have all London assembled in a beautiful house, with a beautiful band, with everybody in their crowns and tiaras, but all the world knew that Lady Thurso had hit the very top note that time, the top note that is struck only once in the season. What the top note was it was difficult to say, just as it is difficult to say why the same ingredients can make two perfectly different puddings, except that it depends on the cook. That ball anyhow, though perhaps the same people had been to twenty other balls, and that the ingredients were the same, was *the* ball of the year, and it was useless for others to compete. That huge success, the wild-flower staircase, might have had something infinitesimal to do with it: that glorious dining-room, not turned upside down and smothered in flowers, might have helped, for the *chic* of not decorating a room at all, but keeping it as it always was, so that apparently you could have this sort of entertainment without fuss or bother of any kind, was undeniable. Yet, again, nobody could turn their staircase into a hayfield without bother. So the upshot was that Lady Thurso alone knew how to do it, what to keep as if "a few friends" only were coming in, what to decorate and how to decorate it, what to say, how to look, what to wear. She had looked, it

may be remarked, magnificent, and wore rubies. The top note had been sounded, as clear as a musical glass.

But much as the ball was talked about, she knew that Count Villars and she were talked about more. Wherever people met together during the week afterward, the ball of course had to be mentioned, but afterward an invariable question came, "Is he still devoted to her?" And the number of comments on that, the interpretations, the guesses, would have satisfied any of those myriad women whose ideal of life is to be talked about in that sort of way. Unfortunately, Lily Thurso did not belong to those ranks; it gave her not the slightest pleasure to know that a situation that concerned her like this, concerned anybody else. Had she, when she had met Count Villars again, said to herself, "Can it be he? I should never have known him!" she might not have cared in the smallest degree what anybody chose to say. But she had not said that; instead, something within her, independent of her own control, it seemed had said "Rudolf." The emotional history which had been interrupted twelve years ago on its very first page had gone on just where it left off. That vague girlish excitement and troubled joy was hers again. But now her twelve years of womanhood wrote their comment on the text. Passion had not been awake in her

then: the potential fire had not been supplied with fuel. But now—in this hour of her life—was the light of dawn, pale and uncertain then, ready to blaze into mid-day? Already she feared to ask herself that.

The pretence of playing at being strangers, when she at the bazaar had called him “your excellency,” had broken down with singular completeness. That very night he had established a footing of old friendship to which, to do him justice, he was perfectly entitled. She could not defend herself against that, she could not resent it. Years ago he had loved her, and had asked her to marry him, and if that does not entitle a man to take the attitude of an old friend when next relations of any sort are resumed, there is nothing in the world that does. Also—and this was not a minor point—she had accepted him and thrown him over. Neither by look nor by word did he appear to cast that up against her now. Yet though in the week that had passed he had assumed—so justly—his right of friendship, he implied much more. She knew perfectly well that he still loved her, and on the night of the ball he had let her know that, and had then never referred to it again. But as he went away then, he said:

“They told me you were more beautiful than

ever, and I said it was not possible. But they were right."

He was florid perhaps: his manners, excellent though they were, had always been a little florid. But he was always sincere. He felt things vividly, and thus expressed them.

It was characteristic of her and of the worldly wisdom with which she always ordered her life that she crammed into the week that followed the ball things which would ordinarily have taken even her ten days to get through. She had seen at once that a question of some importance would some time have to be answered, and having made up her mind as to what her answer would be, she also made it impossible for herself, as far as was in her power, to leave herself any time for reconsidering it. She had, as has been said, no real moral code to refer it to; she had been born, as many people are, without a moral sense, and her upbringing and environment had not spontaneously generated it. She did not, for instance, steal, not because it was wicked to steal, and the commandment told you not to, but because it was mean and nasty, like going about with dirty gloves. And as regards other things, no sense of morals dictated decision now. To put it baldly and blankly, as she did to herself, here was a man who had loved her twelve years ago, and she felt certain still loved her. But she was Thurso's

wife. Other wives—but she reflected that that was not her business. Worldly wisdom, however, said much more than this to her. It would be absurd to appear to be a stranger to Count Villars; if she avoided him, did not treat him with the friendliness that was only his due, the world would certainly say that she avoided him in public to meet him in private. That, she knew, was ridiculous, since London life was a glass case of publicity, but her correct attitude, obviously, was to be friends with him. It was here that Thurso's presence in London was desirable; the whole affair was delicate, and if he was somewhere in Caithness, where there might be typhoid or there might not, her position was more difficult. That the opinion of the world was unduly important to her was very likely to be true, but she lived in it.

Lady Thurso had a charming place on the Thames, just below Maidenhead, which had been left her by her mother, and here she often entertained from Saturday till Monday, not with any mistaken notion that it was a rest after the bustle of London to get into the country, but in order to bustle more than ever. London, it is true, was bustle enough, but the London bustle did not publicly begin till eleven or so, unless she was seeing writers of socialistic articles. Whereas, at Bray Court, the bustle began earlier, since, as this was

the country, it was necessary to play a round of golf or row wildly on the Thames, or bathe in that long-suffering river before the day began at all. Thurso was coming down with her, and they left Thurso House together after luncheon on Saturday. Maud had, so to speak, engaged a bedroom, but as she had not appeared when the motor came round, it was obvious that she was going to find her way on her own account.

“ Well, she’s not here,” said Lily, as she stepped into the car, “ and really we can’t wait, Thurso. Unless we start now, people will get there before we do, and you can’t do that in the country.”

“ No, it’s as well to be at one’s house if one has asked people to stay in it,” he remarked.

He got in after her, but stood for a moment with his hand on the door, as if waiting to give Maud another minute. Her eye happened to fall on it, and she saw it was trembling. The next moment he sat down, caught her eye and looked away again flushing a little. There was something furtive about the movement, which was unlike him. But all this week she had been a little uneasy about him; he had seemed nervous, easily startled, uncertain of himself. And as they started, though caresses were not frequent between them, she laid her hand on his.

"Thurso, old boy," she said, "are you well? There is nothing the matter with you?"

"Perfectly well, thanks," he said. "I don't know why you ask."

"You don't look very well. Maud said, too, that you had had several very bad headaches up North."

"I have had no return of them since I came to town," said he.

The footman had got up by the *chauffeur*, and the big Napier car bubbled and whirred to itself a moment, and then slid noiselessly off with rapid but absolutely smooth acceleration of its pace over the dry street. The roadway was very full, but it flicked in and out of the moving traffic, dancing gently on its springs, with the precision of a fish steering between clumps of waving water-weeds. It seemed more like a sentient animal, a horse with a fine mouth, than a machine, or as if intelligence and discernment, a brain of exquisite delicacy, lived in the long bonnet, rather than merely wheels and cylinders. It slackened its speed before it came to any block in the traffic, as if scenting it from far off; it cut in and out of moving cabs and omnibuses as if possessed of occult knowledge with regard to the pace they were going, and what lay ahead of them; it foresaw impediments to its running that seemed as if they could not be foreseen, and found openings that

appeared invisible. But all down Piccadilly Thurso seemed very nervous, he could hardly sit still, but kept shifting in his seat, frowning and even once calling out to the *chauffeur*, who, as a matter of fact, was one in a thousand, bidding him take care, and go more quietly through the jostle of vehicles. This, again, was quite unlike him, and his wife watched him narrowly and attentively. But when it came to his calling out to the inimitable Marcel, who would sooner have scraped all the skin off his own hands than let another vehicle scrape one grain of paint off the the splash-board of his beloved car, she could not help protesting.

“My dear Thurso,” she said, “what is the matter? He is driving absolutely carefully.”

Thurso frowned and spoke irritably.

“I don’t think he is at all,” he said. “But women are never satisfied till they’ve had a smash.”

This again was utterly unlike him: his tone distinctly failed in courtesy.

“If you are nervous, I will set you down at Paddington,” she said, “and you can take the train.”

“That is absurd,” he said shortly.

They went on in silence for a little and Thurso made a great effort to pull himself together. He knew quite well that his nerves were out of order,

and though it was true that he had no headache since coming to town, that was because he had always stopped it coming on by the liberal use of that drug which never failed. Nor had he taken it only for those purposes, and he knew in himself that he had begun to be dragged into the habit as a man whose clothes are caught between revolving cog-wheels is bound to be dragged in, unless by a superhuman effort he can break away. It was now two days since he had touched it, and he had promised himself as a reward for his abstinence a dose of it when he got down to Bray. After that, so he had planned, he would begin to break away from it again: his next treat should be three days afterward: his next four days. But during the last week in Scotland he had taken it every day and sometimes twice. That would never do: he would at once set about the task of breaking himself of it. That must be done by degrees, however; the intervals between his treats should become longer and longer till he craved for it no more. Craved? How he craved now! It was that which made him so nervous and irritable. Meantime, it was important that Lily should not think that anything was wrong. So before the pause after his last rather snappish reply to her had become long, he spoke again in a different tone.

“ You must forgive me for speaking rudely,”

he said, "and I am sure that Marcel is really careful. But I had rather a trying time up in Scotland, and Dr. Symes told me my nerves were a little jumpy. But it is nothing. He said the best thing I could do was to come down here and amuse myself, and forget all about the typhoid."

"Won't you see a doctor?" she asked.

"No, there's not the slightest need."

"But it's so nice to be told there is nothing wrong," she said.

He laughed.

"Oh, I am sure of that without seeing one," he said.

The house at Bray was long and low and rambling, standing in the middle of flower-beds and lawns and stiff box-hedges cut into shape, which screened it from the river, so that the Sunday afternoon crowd could not, as in most of the riverside houses, observe exactly who was there and what they had for tea. Indeed, had it not been for this impenetrable hedge, what they had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner would have been equally clear, for Lady Thurso had built a big open pavilion on the lawn, where, when the day was hot, it was pleasanter to have all meals. Another pavilion on the opposite side of the lawn served as drawing-room or card-room, and often nobody really set foot in the house at all from

breakfast till bedtime. A dozen guests were all that the house itself would hold, but if, as often happened, people proposed themselves at the last moment, it was possible to get accommodation for them at a neighboring hotel, where they retired for the night. To-day, however, there was going to be no sleeping out. It was doubtful, indeed, whether the house itself would be quite full. Maud was certainly coming, Count Villars and Alice Yardly and her husband were certainties, as also were Jim Stratton and Ruby Majendie, and a couple of American cousins had proposed themselves, but that only brought their number up to ten. Lily hardly knew whether she was or was not glad of this. For once, it is true, she would have a quiet Sunday, but she was a little worried, not only about the emotional history of her own which has been touched on, but also about her husband, and she was not sure that she would not have preferred rush and bustle. Yet, after all, with only these few people in the house, she could keep herself fairly well occupied. The American cousins, too, a plain elderly millionaire, dyspeptic and rather mournful, with his wife who was young, voluble, and carried about with her, as it were, pails of gross and fulsome flattery, with which she whitewashed everybody, would want a little management. Lily, however, never neglected even the most distant cousins when they

came to England, for she had inherited from her mother that idea of American hospitality which makes all other hospitality churlish in comparison, and did not consider her duty as done when she had asked even the most undesirable cousins to dinner. She acknowledged to herself that these particular ones were a little trying, but she acknowledged it to nobody else. Silas P. Morton, in fact, and Theodosia, whom he always addressed slowly as Theodosia, giving each syllable its full value, had arrived before they got there, and met them hospitably at the front door.

“ Why, if this doesn’t tickle me to death,” exclaimed Theodosia, “ to receive you at your own house, Lily; and how are you, Lord Thurso, and my, what a beautiful motor! Silas and I got here just half an hour ago, and your servants brought us tea right away out on the lawn and made us ever so much at home. But as I’m forever saying to everybody, ‘ Lily Thurso is just perfect, and everything she has is just perfect—her husband, her houses, her dress, her motor-car.’ Don’t I, Silas? ”

There was never any silence when Theodosia was present. She was usually talking when somebody else was talking, and she was always talking when nobody else was.

“ Don’t you what, Theodosia? ” said he.

“Don’t I always tell everybody that Lily Thurso is just perfect? Why, your ball the other night— I’ve seen a good many balls, but never have I seen anything like that. I guess you’re proud of your wife, Lord Thurso. And I guess she’s proud of you.”

This was all very pleasant, and Theodosia kept it up. She was never tired or silent, and it was a matter of serious conjecture whether anything known to happen would make her stop talking. She talked all the time she was at a dentist’s, even when her mouth was full of pads and gags, and she had once talked without intermission through a railway accident. At intervals the voice of her husband said “Theodosia!” like a clock striking, but the ticking went on in spite of it.

“And if that isn’t the cunningest yew hedge I ever saw,” she said, “with doors cut in it just as if it were a wall, so that you can see the river through it. Lord Thurso, can you see the river through it from where you’re sitting? Silas, change places with Lord Thurso, because I want him to see the river through it. My, look at that bug! What do you call them? Oh, yes, butterfly—what a beauty! Why, if it isn’t going to settle right here on the arm of my chair. Isn’t it tame? The bugs in America aren’t half as tame as that. Are they, Silas?”

Lily finished her tea with extraordinary celerity

and got up. It was she who had asked Theodosia here, and she did not for a moment repent having done so, but she began to foresee that it would be necessary to provide Theodosia with relays of companions who should take her for little walks and little excursions in the punt and drives in the motor, if she wanted to save her Saturday till Monday from shipwreck. She thanked Heaven that Maud was coming, who was always so serene in dealing with impossible people, and listened to their impossible conversation in a manner that was quite marvellous. Clearly, also, it was by a direct dealing of Providence that Alice Yardly was of this party, for Alice asked for nothing more than to be allowed to talk. She was perfectly happy sitting opposite somebody who talked simultaneously so long as she was not interrupted by violent things like direct questions. Theodosia never asked them. She asked questions by the score, but never required any answer. Alice and she talking to each other would be a most happy pair.

So she took Theodosia now to the river, and punted her about, "punted her around" was Theodosia's subsequent phrase for it, and when they returned it was to find that everybody who was expected had arrived and had gone to their rooms to dress. The evening was divinely warm, and dinner was to take place out of doors in one

of the pavilions. Lady Thurso was a quick dresser, and though everybody else was already dressing, she found that she had ten minutes to spare after she had shown Theodosia her room. So, instead of going at once to dress, she went to Maud's room. Maud was betwixt and between, with a river of hair flowing goldenly down her back, and much excursive geniality.

"Dearest Lily," she said, "but it was too awful of me, and I hope you didn't wait. I was late for lunch, and late starting afterward, and as there were other people going to Taplow, I motored down with them. Isn't the country looking too divine? Did Thurso come with you? Do stop and talk to me for five minutes. I know you dress like lightning. How many maids surround you? Three, is it? Oh, what fun all last week has been. You really do give your relations a good time. And it's an old-established custom for you to smoke a cigarette while you wait till it's time for you to dress. Do smoke!"

Lady Thurso lit a cigarette, and catching Maud's eye nodded in the direction of her maid and spoke in French.

"Send her away for a few minutes," she said.

Maud gave a little giggle of laughter.

"What a bad language to choose," she said, "because Hortense is French. Aren't you, Hor-

tense? Will you go away, please, and come back when her ladyship leaves me? ”

Then Maud turned to her sister-in-law.

“ Now, dear Lily, what is it? ” she asked.

“ Well, first, do be very kind, Maud, and take Theodosia away on all possible occasions, so that she gets on Thurso’s nerves as little as may be.”

Maud brought a long braid of hair round her shoulder.

“ Then I know what you really want to talk about,” she said. “ Theodosia first, and afterward? ”

“ Exactly. Thurso’s nerves. He was fearfully jumpy coming down, and I’m sure he isn’t well,” she said. “ Has he been having bad headaches up in Scotland? ”

“ Yes, day after day,” said Maud.

She paused a moment, wondering whether she had better say what was on the tip of her tongue. Then she settled to do so: after all it was her brother’s wife to whom she was talking.

“ He had to get through his day’s work, too,” she said, “ and I think he took laudanum rather freely. I was anxious about that, too. I think he ought to get a doctor’s advice about it.”

“ Ah, but his headaches have ceased,” said Lily, with sudden relief; “ he told me he had not had one since he came to town.”

“ I’m very glad,” rejoined Maud, “ because—

Well, it can't be a good thing to get in the habit of taking that stuff, only while he was up there he had to get relief somehow. But of course if he has had no return of them, one needn't be anxious any more."

Lily looked at her and then spoke quite quietly.

"You are not telling me quite all," she said. "I think you had better."

Maud had no inclination to do otherwise; even if Lily had not guessed this, she would probably have told her.

"Quite true," she said. "And it is this. He has begun to take it for its own sake. Coming up in the train, for instance, he thought I was asleep, and I saw him—yes, I spied on him, if you like—I saw him go to his bag, take out the bottle and take a dose. He had no headache, he was never better. He wanted the effects of it. It was a big dose, too, double the ordinary one, I should say."

Lady Thurso said "Thank you, Maud," and was silent again. "What do you advise?" she asked at length.

"Get him to see a doctor."

"He won't. We must think it over. Of course it is desirable that I should appear to find out what you have told me for myself—find out, that is to say, that he is taking this stuff."

“ You may say I told you, if that will do any good,” said Maud.

Lady Thurso went down the passage to her room. Outside Thurso’s dressing-room was standing his valet, and a sudden thought occurred to her.

“ Is his lordship dressed, do you know? ” she asked.

“ No, my lady, his lordship told me he would call me when he began,” said the man.

She went to the door, tapped and entered.

“ Flynn told me you weren’t dressing yet,” she said, “ and I wanted to talk to you a moment. I’m afraid you must take in Alice Yardly and have Theodosia next you. But we’ll change about to-morrow.”

Thurso was lying on his sofa doing nothing, with no book and paper near him. He had not been sleeping apparently, for his eyes were wide and bright. He laughed as she spoke.

“ Why should we change about to-morrow? ” he said. “ I delight in Theodosia. I delight in everything to-night. Is it dressing time? Don’t let’s have dinner till half-past eight. It is absurd dining at eight in the summer, and the hours before dinner are so delicious. I don’t feel as if I could dress yet.”

Lily had walked to the window and was observing him closely. He stretched himself luxuriously

as he spoke, and she saw he had a cigarette in each hand, both of which were burning.

“ Is that a new plan,” she said, “ smoking two cigarettes at once? ”

“ Yes, so far as I am concerned, but not original. Don’t you remember the Pirate King in ‘ Peter Pan ’ smokes two, or was it three, cigars together. The moral is that you can’t have too much of a good thing: one should take one’s pleasures thick, not thin. I am enjoying myself. It was an excellent plan to come down here. How wonderful the light is, how good everything smells! ”

He turned a little on his sofa, so that he faced her as she stood by the window with the light shining on to her delicate profile.

“ And, my God, how beautiful you are, Lily! ” he said.

She left the window and came and stood close to him. She felt certain as to what he had been doing; she had been with him before when laudanum gave him relief from one of his headaches.

“ Thurso, have you had any headache to-day? ” she asked.

“ Headache? No! I’ve forgotten what headaches are like.”

“ Then why have you been taking laudanum, opium, whatever it is? ” she asked.

“ I—haven’t,” he said, stumbling for a moment on the word.

She went quickly across to the washing-stand, took up a glass that stood there and smelled it.

“ Where is the use of saying that? ” she asked.

He got up quickly, ashamed of having lied to her, and ashamed of his stupidity in not being more careful. But his shame was infinitesimal compared to his anger with her. She had come in and smashed up all his happiness; instead of that wonderful sense of well-being, of utter physical and mental contentment, he felt only furiously enraged against her. He had taken his laudanum, and what right had she to break in upon the divine effects of it, robbing him of what he had bought and paid for?

“ And where is the use of your interfering like this? ” he said. “ You have spoiled it all now. It would serve you right if I took another dose now and did not come down to dinner. You know nothing about it at all. I was a martyr to those headaches up in Scotland, and I began, yes, I began to get into the habit of it. But I am breaking myself of it. Till to-night I hadn’t taken any for two days, and I was not going to take any more for three days, and after that for four. You seem to think . . . I don’t know what you think.”

She felt more tenderly toward him at this mo-

ment than she had felt perhaps for years. His weakness, his voluble incoherent weakness, as of a child making excuses, touched her.

“ Oh, Thurso, you don’t know what a dangerous thing you are doing,” she said. “ Do be a man, and don’t think about three days and four days, but stop it now at once. The longer it goes on the more difficult you will find it. Give me the bottle, or whatever it is, like a good fellow, and let me throw it away. You will be glad you have done so every day of your life.”

The effect of the drug was still on him, enhancing the beauty of the light and of the country smells, enhancing, too, her beauty as she pleaded with him. His anger died down, and as for his shame, her appeal somehow mitigated that. The habit he had begun to form was not yet deeply rooted, his will was not yet overcome, and all his best self told him that she was right beyond any need or possibility of argument. He unlocked his despatch box, and took out a bottle, half empty.

“ Yes, you are right,” he said; “ here it is. Don’t despise me if you can help it, Lily.”

“ Thank you, Thurso,” she said, “ thank you most awfully. You will be so glad.”

She went to the window and poured the brown fluid out among the leaves of the creeper. Then she flung the bottle into the shrubbery.

“ I ought to thank you,” he said. “ And I do. Thank you, dear.”

The evening was extraordinarily warm and windless, and though Mr. Silas Moreton sent for a black and white plaid which he put round his shoulders for fear of chills, no one else felt the necessity of extra wraps, and after dinner a bridge table was started for the two Americans with Ruby and Jim Stratton, while the others preferred for the present to wander about in the dusk. The light still lingered in the sky, and the smooth surface of the river lay westward in pools and reaches of reflected sunset. White moths hovered over the garden beds, emerging every now and then from the darkness into the bright light cast by the lamps in the shelter in which they had dined, and the odors of night began to steal about. Lily, when they rose from the table, found Count Villars by her side, inclined for a stroll, and leaving the others they went down through the door cut in the box hedge, to catch the last of the evening light on the river. Woman of the world though she was, and skilled at directing talk into channels in which she wished it to flow, she still felt a little nervous with him. At dinner he had been the polished, suggestive talker, but it had seemed to her all

the time as if he was talking from the surface only, saying the quick, glib things that came so easily to him. And when they had separated themselves from the others, she found her impression had been correct.

"It was so good of you to ask me here," he said, "because that means that you admit me again to friendship and intimacy with you. At least, I take it at that."

He found and struck a match to light his cigarette, holding it in hollowed hands, so that the flame vividly illuminated his face. He had changed extraordinarily little: his dark eyes still had the fire of youth in them, and his face had neither grown stout nor attenuated: his hair was still untouched by gray, and a plume of it hung as she had always remembered it, a little apart and over his forehead. He wore neither mustache nor beard, and a very short upper lip separated his rather large and essentially masculine mouth from a thin aquiline nose. Then as he chucked the match away, he threw his head back with the gesture she knew so well.

"Or is that presumptuous of me?" he said gayly. "I charge you to tell me that, and not let me go on being presumptuous unintentionally."

She laughed.

"Not in the least presumptuous," she said.

“ One asks any one to one’s house if there is a crowd there, for what does it matter who comes in a crowd? But here in the country, one only asks the people one wants to see. And the more one wants to see them, the smaller is the party to which one asks them.”

“ That is encouraging,” he said. “ It is kind of you. Now, dear Lady Thurso, we have not seen each other for a long time, and though old histories are tiresome, I do want to know one thing. Never mind the history, the events, but are you happy? Have you been happy? ”

She paused a moment.

“ Yes, immensely happy,” she said. “ At least my life suits me, which I suppose implies happiness. I am—what is the cant phrase?—in harmony with my environment. And you? ”

“ Ah, well, I have been ambitious, and I have got what I wanted. I suppose I should be content with that. But when I accepted this post in England, I did it because I wanted something more.”

“ And you have got it? ” she asked.

“ You have just promised it me, your friendship. I was very anxious about that.”

She laughed again, conscious of a determination not to let the conversation get deeper than this. But for the moment it was out of her hands, for he went on in that cool, quiet voice,

separating each word from its neighbor, giving each its individual value.

“ People who have been old friends,” he said, “ often make a great mistake in thinking over and wondering about the past. I assure you I am not going to do that. I am more than content to take up the present, just as it is, fragrant with the promise of your friendship, and fragrant, too, with the knowledge that you have been happy. I would have given my whole life to make you that, and now that it has come to you without any effort on my part, why, let us rejoice over the economy of my energy! ”

They had come to the end of the path by the river, where a gate bordered on the high road outside, and paused a moment before retracing their steps. A big yellow moon had risen over the trees to the east, so that while the western part of the sky still glowed with sunset, the east was flooded with that cold white flame that turns every color into ivory or ebony. And this strange effect was reproduced on his face, as he stood facing north, for the warmth of color from the west shone on one cheek and on the other the white coldness of the moon. And, fantastically enough, she seemed to read his words in a double light: they were cordial and generous enough, but was their generosity that of a fisherman who trails a gift of free food—only the free food

has a hook inside it which will capture and bring his prey to him?

But then instantly she told herself that she was utterly unwarranted and unjustified in such a conjecture. His words had been absolutely guileless, nor had she the slightest cause for interpreting them otherwise. What she had done was to read into them the knowledge that twelve years ago she had treated him abominably, and credit him with a desire for revenge. It was for that reason that she had a touch of distrust toward him. She feared him, too. Beneath his quiet, kind words there was a sense of mastery, that he was doing as he meant to do, that, as he had said, he wanted many things and got them. What, then, did he want of her? He had told her: her friendship.

It was like him, too, like his consummate cleverness, which it required a certain perception to see at all, so subtle and natural was it, to say these deep and serious things about her happiness and her friendship, things which he knew well would remain in her mind, and be food for thought, and round off the sentence with a pure triviality of light conversation about the economy of energy. He dangled it before her, as a rescuing rope may be dangled before some one at the bottom of a deep well, and, exactly as he had intended, she instantly seized it, thinking it

was she who had without transition changed the conversation, whereas it was he who, having said his say, had done so.

"I really don't know if one ought to rejoice in economy of energy," she said, as they turned to walk back. "There is such an enormous lot of energy in the world, almost a glut of it. I know I have quite as much as I have any use for. I should find more of it embarrassing."

"You are admirable," he said. "I believe there is never a kind scheme brought before you to which you do not give your real support, not the mere buttress of your name, but your time, your pains, your speech. But you see you economize energy in other directions."

"What directions?" she asked.

"Emotional. You never worry, do you? You never regret. You never allow passion of any sort to master you."

This again was rather more intimate than she liked, yet somehow she did not resent it. Perhaps it would be true to say she could not resent it, for in his very gentleness there was inherent a strength that made resentment futile: you might as well resent the slow moving on of a glacier. It would do no good resenting it, and Lily always set her face against doing things that were no good.

"No, I don't think I worry," she said.

Then suddenly she told herself she was being afraid of this man, and her next words, simple and short as they were, required a certain effort of courage, for she asserted herself against him.

"And certainly I never regret," she said. "People talk of destiny as if it was a force outside themselves. If I thought that, I should, no doubt, sometimes regret the dealings of destiny. But I don't. In all important decisions destiny is really one's own will. And my will isn't weak, I think. I will what I will. Is that nonsense?"

"No, very admirable sense," said he. "And what if another's destiny or will comes into conflict with yours?"

"Oh, then one has to fight," said she.

He laughed.

"In all your battles may success ever attend the most deserving!" he said.

"That is ambiguous," she said. "That may be a curse, not a blessing, on my arms."

"You think, then, I am so disloyal as to be able to imagine that any one is more deserving than you?" he asked.

Again he was a little flowery: he was almost a little fruity.

"You still delight in phrase, I see," she said.

"Phrases are often quite sincere," he said.

They joined the others after this, and not long after Lily suggested adjournment, as they had

all come down to the country to rest, and herself went upstairs immediately. But the rest for which she had come into the country did not immediately come to her, and though she was usually an excellent sleeper, first one thing and then another kept her from crossing the drowsy borderland. Now it would be Thurso who pulled her back into waking consciousness, and the wonder what was the wise step to take about him. You couldn't play with drugs like that. . . . Yet he had allowed her to throw that bottle away. True, but what if he sent for another? Then her mind went swiftly forward over the events of the next week: it was crammed full of things to do; she was glad of that, for she would have no time for thought. She did not want to think . . . then she turned on her side and began to do so.

Why had Rudolf Villars come back to trouble her tranquillity? He said he had come back really to gain her friendship. But what if she could not give it him, what if her friendship meant something more? She felt sure he loved her; she wished she felt sure that she was not beginning to love him. No one else had ever affected her like that. She resented that . . . yet she had said that it was a person's own will which was usually destiny, and her will was perfectly made up on the subject. But what if it

came into conflict with another will? She was afraid of him, too . . . or, was it of herself that she was afraid?

Round and round in her head went the incessantly turning wheel of thought. She thought of Thurso again, and of the danger in which he stood, then again she thought of Rudolf Villars, and . . . did she, too, stand in danger?

She had drawn back her curtains, leaving only the blind to cover the wide open window, and the moon outside shone full on it, making all the furniture and details of her room vividly visible. The walls were white, the sofas and chairs were white also, and on her toilet-table glimmered the silver of the mirror-frame and the silver handles of brushes and toilet articles. How much or how little these familiar things meant to us! How external sights and sounds and objects could be soaked with emotion, and how again they could be just like dry sponges, hard and gritty almost to the touch. But all she saw here, in this her bedchamber, was no more than dry sponge, no wine or liquor of love had soaked into these things. All her life she had missed that, and how much that was she was beginning to guess. 'Arry and 'Arriet in the street, who changed hats and shouted songs, were so infinitely richer than she, in spite of all she had, her position, her beauty, her gifts, her kindliness. All these

should have been the trappings and harness of the chariot of love. Without it they were remnants, odds and ends, fit only for a jumble sale. Once she had had, perhaps, the opportunity of knowing what it was; but she had been very young then; she could not guess how all-important was her choice, and at that age her mother's will rather than her own had been her destiny. But now, she knew, that gift, which she had rejected before, was coming nearer again to her: it would be offered again.

Yet still her will was her destiny, and sooner than play with these thoughts and admit argument over them, she got up, meaning to read a book till sleep came to her. The book she wanted was on the table in the window, and without striking a light she crossed over to it. The clock on the mantelpiece had only just chimed two, and a light shone from under the chink of the door on the left that led to Thurso's dressing-room, so that she knew the house was not asleep yet. Also from outside she heard the subdued crunch of gravel underneath the heel of some one who still loitered there, and simultaneously some one (the loiterer probably) began whistling a little tune below his breath, a little Austrian folk-song that she had not heard for years. But that, that simple little melody, was soaked and dripping with emotion for her.

Lily leaned farther out, her bare white arms crossed on the sill. The glamour of the night—whereof that low-whistled melody seemed the keynote and inspiration—was strong upon her.

The moon threw black weird shadows on lawn and shrubbery. Darker than the surrounding shade, his white shirt-front faintly visible against the dense shadow of a clump of yews, stood Vilars. In his hand glowed the tip of a half-smoked cigarette. Lily could feel his eyes upon her although his face at that distance was but a pale blur.

And thus they stood, he and she, for perhaps a full minute; darkness and light barring the stretch of lawn between them; they two alone in all the world. Then——

From the hither side of the line of shrubs rose a faint, crackling noise, as of a twig snapped under a stealthy foot. Lily's eyes instinctively followed the trend of the sound, and rested on a furtive, crawling Something burrowing its way on all fours along the hedge.

Grotesque, amorphous, the Thing progressed; now rising, now flattening Itself against the earth; constantly pausing to examine various portions of the shrubbery. Breathless, Lily watched It's movements, until, her gaze growing accustomed to the hedge-thrown shadows, she saw that the prowling creature was a man; creeping silently along

on all fours, feeling to right and to left as though for something he had lost. Lily's first thought was that the intruder was a burglar and in search of his concealed lantern or kit of tools. If he should come upon Villars—standing so unsuspectingly, a bare twenty yards away, on the farther side of the shrubbery! She had drawn in her breath for a cry of warning when the cry died in a noiseless gurgle in her throat.

For the Unknown had momentarily entered a patch of white moonlight, and the rays fell full on his face. He was Thurso.

The momentary exultation following on the Earl's scene with Lily earlier in the day had quickly faded. All the more quickly when he had realized that by an act that now struck him as madly Quixotic, he had deprived himself of the phial which held such boundless potential surcease for him. Ordinarily, he would not have desired the drug again so soon; but the bare fact that it was now wholly inaccessible—that he could not, if he chose, secure a drop of it—so excited his imagination that the craving rushed back on him with tenfold force.

He could not leave his guests to go or even send to Windsor to the nearest chemist's for another supply; and when at a later hour he was free, all shops were of course closed. Hence, as the evening progressed, the longing—fiercer for the in-

ability to gratify it—grew beyond all endurance. He could not sleep. The memory of the precious bottle hurled out into the shrubbery rose again and again before him. Into the shrubbery—he remembered that the phial had a narrow neck. The fall, unless the glass receptacle had smashed from impact with the soft turf, could not wholly have emptied it. There must be some—at least part of a dose—left in it. If only he could find the discarded phial.

It was absurdly easy to pass unnoticed from the house and to gain the friendly shelter of the shrubbery. Here—somewhere—was the bottle. But it is hard to find a missing object, even in a circumscribed space, by night. Over and over the ground he crept, bruising and cutting his fingers in vain groping for the coveted treasure. He could fancy how its cool, polished surface would feel; how he would lift it to the light to see how much of the divine elixir remained in it. How——

The brushing of his face against a leafy twig filled his nostrils with the sickly smell of laudanum. Like a discouraged fox-hound that unexpectedly picks up the scent, Thurso's spirits rose with a bound. Here, or near here, the phial must have struck; its contents spattering the shrubs. If only too much had not been wasted!

Disregarding caution, Thurso "beat" the surrounding turf, fumbling at the roots of the hedge.

Plunging forward in a momentary loss of balance he threw out his hands to keep from falling. His fingers closed about a damp, chilly surface. In another instant the phial was in his hands. A delicious thrill of relief swept across him, leaving him faint.

But at the next moment, firm, light footsteps crossing toward him from the farther side of the hedge, drove the blood back in a wave to his heart and set him trembling. If Lily or his sister should have seen him and——

With childish fury he resolved not to be deprived of the joy that he had so hardly acquired. He lifted the phial to his mouth and swallowed. It contained more of the liquid than he had thought; more than ever before he had taken. He crouched in the shadows and waited for the first dull sensation of numbness and nervous relief that should herald his approach to Eden. And as he waited the footsteps drew nearer, passed him and moved into the full moonlight beneath Lily's window.

Thurso looked up and recognized Villars. He remained spellbound and speechless as his eyes devoured the silent figure and his brain slowly began to grasp the possible reasons for its presence.

A gust of wrath pierced the sweet numbness that enveloped Thurso's senses. Staggering to his feet, for he was cramped from long, tense

stooping, he hurried out into the moonlight in pursuit.

The double dose of laudanum, following so soon on its predecessor, had already begun to work upon mind and body. It was strangely easy to move. And the night was very beautiful. More beautiful than any the world had ever known. A night of the gods; and he, a god, in full possession of its glories. He must share its beauties, its intoxicating wonders, with some one. There was Villars! How opportunely he happened to be there at the moment! But then, everything was opportune, perfect.

“Villars,” he murmured, touching the other’s shoulder, and there was a dreamy ecstasy in his voice that the Count’s swift start and look of alarm could not mar, “Villars! Did you ever know there could be such a night as this? You look like a Greek god, posing here in the moonlight. I wonder I never before realized what a classic face and splendid figure you have! Look there to the left. Do you see that bright track over the river, leading straight to within a few feet of the farther bank? I always used to think that track was made of moonlight. But it is not. It is of silver—purest silver. And you and I are going to be the first mortals to walk across it.”

As he had been speaking, Thurso had continued to move toward the river, drawing the dum-

founded Villars along with a grip from which there was no escaping. They neared the bank.

“To think!” murmured Thurso in utter ecstasy, “that it should have been reserved for us two, of all the world, to be the first to pass along that silver track. Don’t hesitate, man! It’s the heaven-sent chance of a lifetime.”

For Villars, with his foot on the sloping brink, had sought to draw back. But his strength was puny and useless against the mad power of his guide.

“Have no fear!” laughed Thurso, “I will hold you in safety. Come!”

Up to his knees the frightened Austrian was dragged into the cold water. He could not swim, and the black depths before him yawned menacingly. The madman, a rapt look on his white face, took no note of the water, but pressed on. A last futile struggle, a gasping cry of horror from Villars, and the river had risen to their waists.

“Thurso!”

It was Lily’s voice. Standing on the bank, her loose white dressing gown fluttering in the night breeze, she called gently, yet commandingly.

The Earl turned.

“It is a goddess!” he muttered; “Venus Anodyomene!”

Releasing the trembling Count, he stumbled blindly back to shore.

CHAPTER VI

MAUD was lying in a long chair on the lawn the next afternoon, defending Christian Science from the tongues of the mockers, of whom there were many. She had an ally, it is true, in Alice Yardly, who in her big hat and white dress with a blue sash, looked like a doubtful Romney, and was smiling, literally, with all her might. The more the mockers mocked the kinder and wider grew her smile. As an ally, however, Maud for her part would sooner have done battle alone, for Alice was rather of the nature of an ally whose main work was to reveal to the enemy the weak points in the fortifications and the undefended angles. Wherever—so Maud felt—there was any possible difficulty in “the scheme of things entire” Alice Yardly was there waving a large cheerful flag to call attention to it.

“No, I’m not a Christian Scientist, Thurso,” said Maud, “and I only told you all at lunch, because I thought it would interest you what I actually saw. Sandy, the nurse said, was absolutely dying, and though it was really no use, she wanted Dr. Symes to be sent for. Well, I didn’t send for him, but I went up with Mr. Cochran,

and I saw Mr. Cochran pull Sandy out of the jaws of death."

"Be fair, Maud," said Thurso; "tell them what Dr. Symes said when he came next morning."

"I was going to: he said he had known cases where the temperature went suddenly down from high fever to below normal, and it did not mean perforation. It meant simply what it was—the sudden cessation of fever and nothing else."

Alice Yardly leaned forward.

"Mortal mind had caused the fever originally," she said, "and it was the belief that mortal mind had caused it that Mr. Cochran made Sandy perceive. So he was able to throw off the false claim that he had fever, knowing that he couldn't have fever since fever is evil, and Infinite Love cannot send evil to anybody. It was knowing that that made his temperature go down, and let him get well. It was only with his mortal mind that the fever could be perceived, since there is no real sensation in matter, just as he had caught it originally through mortal mind. But Immortal Mind knows there is no sensation in matter and so no disease; as David said: 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day,' and when Sandy by the truth of immortal mind per-

ceived that, of course the false claim of temperature ceased and it went down."

Maud gave a sigh, not of impatience but of very conscious patience, which is near akin to it.

"Darling Alice," she said, "you haven't understood a single word from the beginning; Mr. Cochran didn't make his temperature go down."

"No, of course not," said Alice, "it was trust in Immortal Mind that did that, for as soon as Sandy perceived——"

Maud sat up and clapped her hands.

"I will finish one sentence just for once," she cried. "You don't understand: it was the sudden subsidence of temperature that was the dangerous symptom. Mr. Cochran demonstrated *because* Sandy's temperature had gone down. He had nothing to do with bringing it down."

Alice's smile suffered no diminution.

"Fever cannot be sent by Immortal Mind," she said, "because fever is evil, and the belief in it is a function of mortal mind. No evil can happen to any one who roots out the beliefs of mortal mind, and no drug can have any effect, beneficial or harmful, unless the person who takes it believes with mortal mind in its effect."

Thurso entered the arena.

"Then if I thought that large quantities of prussic acid for breakfast would be good for me, they would be good for me?" he said.

“If you drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt you,” quoted Alice.

“My!” said Theodosia, “you’d better become a Christian Scientist at once, Silas. Silas adores, he just adores, English beer, but it’s absolute poison to him. Now, Lady Yardly, how did he get the idea that English beer was poison to him? It disagreed with him from the first moment he put his lips to it.”

“Theodosia,” began Silas. But he was not permitted to continue.

“Intoxicant drinks are in themselves evil things,” said Alice. “You will find that in Mrs. Eddy’s miscellaneous writings. I never touch them.”

Count Villars joined in.

“That is taken to prove it?” he asked politely. “Is Mrs. Eddy always inspired? Cannot she have attacks of error or mortal mind? Is it not, as Oliver Cromwell said, just possible that Mrs. Eddy made a mistake? I should have thought one might find instances where intoxicating fluids had possibly saved life in cases of exhaustion or exposure to cold.”

Maud broke in again.

“Dear Alice, you are leading everybody away from the point, you know,” she said; “you really do go on saying ‘Cuckoo, cuckoo,’ long after the hour has struck. I want to talk about one

thing, and you are encouraging Thurso and Count Villars to talk about others. I did see, and I stick to it, I did see a man, who was past human power, pulled back into life by Mr. Cochran. Also—I have only his word for it, but that seems to me a very sound thing, as you would all think if you knew him—he told me he was demonstrating over the whole outbreak of fever. Well, no fresh case occurred after he had begun doing that.”

“My!” said Theodosia again, “I wish he would come to New York when the influenza was about. I guess influenza needs a lot of demonstration. Why, if there isn’t the motor coming round, and I’m not ready yet.”

Thurso got up too.

“Well, who wants to go over to Windsor, and who wants to go on the river, and who wants to do nothing?” he asked.

This broke up the conference, as it was designed to do. Count Villars and Lady Yardly expressed a preference for the river, Thurso and Theodosia with her husband went to Windsor, Ruby Majendie and Jim had already vanished, and Lord Yardly murmured something about letters and went toward the house. In consequence, Maud and her sister-in-law, both of whom preferred to do nothing whatever, were left alone. There had been a certain design about this, though successfully veiled, on Lily’s part. She

wanted to talk to Maud, and very gentle hinting had been sufficient to make other people choose other things. Count Villars seemed disposed to reconsider the respective values of the river and the lawn when he realized what the disposition of the party was, but he was already committed and did not attempt diplomatic evasions which would have deceived nobody.

The rest of the party dispersed in their various directions, and it was not till the motor had crunched the drive, and the steam launch puffed its way past the yew hedge, that Lily spoke again.

“Tell me more about this Mr. Cochran,” she said.

Maud was already half-immersed in her book: she had been quite unconscious of Lily’s diplomacy. She started, however, when the question was put to her, and flushed a little.

“There really is no more to tell,” she said. “I think I have told you all. By the way, he is coming to town some time this month. You could see him if you wanted. He did cure Sandy: also he cured Duncan Fraser’s wife. I am convinced of those things. Then there is the other fact: the typhoid ceased when he, so to speak, took it in hand. Of course, you may say it was a coincidence: you may say that those cures, too, were coincidences. But when coincidences come

in a bunch like that, one wonders if there is not some—well, some law—which lies behind them and accounts for them.”

She paused a moment.

“A lot of apples and other things fell to the ground,” she said, “and Newton deduced the law of gravity from them.”

Lily Thurso lit a cigarette, and threw the match away with quite unnecessary vigor.

“What a fool Alice Yardly is!” she observed. “She is, isn’t she? Somehow if a person talks such abject nonsense as that about anything, one concludes that the subject she is talking about is nonsense, too. But it doesn’t follow. And Mr. Cochran doesn’t talk nonsense?” she asked.

“No. He isn’t the least nonsensical. As you see, he goes and cures people when they are really ill, instead of, well, guessing. He’s a very good fisherman, too.”

Lily could not help laughing, Maud had mentioned this in a voice of such high approval.

“But isn’t that inconsistent?” she asked. “If you don’t believe in the reality of death, it seems to me odd to go and kill things.”

“Oh, I think it’s inconsistent,” said Maud, “and so does he. But did you ever see anybody who wasn’t inconsistent? I never did. I never want to, either—he would be so very dull. Like a chronometer.”

“ And Mr. Cochran isn’t? ”

Maud raised her eyebrows, and dropped the book she was reading.

“ Dear Lily,” she said, “ are you fishing? ”

Lily laughed again.

“ I think I am,” she remarked.

“ About me? Of course, I will tell you then and save you the trouble. I am not in the least in love with Mr. Cochran, nor have I the smallest reason to believe that he is in love with me. That was the sort of fishing you meant, wasn’t it? Brutally put, was it that? ”

“ Yes, to be frank. Now I want to talk about something quite different. I went straight to Thurso’s room last night after seeing you. He had just taken laudanum. Not because he had any pain. He told me so. But he let me pour the rest of it out of the window, which I did.”

For obvious reasons Lady Thurso omitted all mention of her action’s sequel.

Maud’s face, which had been one of amused merriment at her accurate conjecture as to her sister-in-law’s fishing, grew quite grave again.

“ That is something,” she said.

“ Yes, it is a bit of cotton wool with chloroform on it, which you put into a decayed tooth, to stop its aching,” she said. “ But what afterwards? Something permanent has to be done.”

Lily bent forward and picked up the book that Maud had let fall.

“Advise me, dear Maud,” she said.

“You are troubled about it?” she asked. “You are really troubled? I was too, by the way, but all this delicious week in London made me forget.”

“I am horribly troubled,” said Lily. “I—I am troubled all round. Do talk—do reassure me. You are so simple and straightforward.”

This was quite true. Maud was possessed of a well-spring of transcendent honesty; sometimes she found that to be a convenient gift, because people trusted her; sometimes it was inconvenient, since she had to live up to it, and at this moment was forced to reconsider a recent statement of hers.

“Oh, Lily, how tiresome you are!” she said, in a tone of deep reproach. “I tell you the truth, as far as I can, then you probe me further. At least I suppose you are fishing again.”

Lily smiled.

“I was not, but I am,” she said. “What is it?”

“Oh, it’s me,” said Maud despairingly. “It’s me and our Mr. Cochran. Lily, I do like him awfully; I like him most awfully. No one has ever attracted me like that. I—I could put all my affairs into his hands with the utmost con-

fidence. He is so strong, you know. We women want somebody awfully strong, don't we? Somebody who would make you go on playing Bridge in the middle of an earthquake. Well, he is like that. I said I was not in love with him. I thought it was true—but I don't know. Perhaps being in love means that. You see, it has never happened before to me. I can't recognize it, or say 'This is love,' because I haven't seen it before. But you can tell me. When you said you would marry Thurso, was it that, or something like that? Oh, dear, poor Mr. Cochran! He hasn't shown the slightest inclination to ask me to marry him."

There was a fine irony about this, and Lily Thurso, despite the previous discussion on Christian Science, felt at that moment much inclined to believe in the inherent malice of chance questions. But her answer was according to the spirit, though not strictly in accordance with the letter.

"Give him his chance then, Maud," she said. "I think entirely as you do. It is strength that is to us the adorable thing. And that," she added with sudden adroitness, "is what bothers me about Thurso just now. It is so weak to allow yourself to make habits that you know all the time are harmful. I always give up anything I want before I want it very badly."

There was irony about this, too. But it was necessarily unperceived by Maud.

“ You, who get all you want! ” she said.

Lily got up, and began walking up and down the lawn where they sat that bordered the deep flower bed. All June was in flower then, just as in herself all June appeared to be flowering. It was no wonder that Maud thought that. But all the emotional baggage, that she had consistently thrown away all her life, seemed to her to be coming back now, returned to her by some dreadful dead-letter office.

“ Oh, yes, everybody else always thinks one is happy,” she said, “ if one has good teeth and a good digestion, and rather more money than one really wants to spend. Do you think I am happy?” she asked suddenly.

Maud dropped her eyes.

“ No, I don’t, if again you fish deep for what I think,” she said.

“ Then you are two people,” said Lily, rather fiercely. “ The superficial Maud, and another Maud who has to be angled for.”

“ Yes, just that,” said she. “ And so are you. And so is everybody who is worth anything.”

Maud paused a moment, knowing that her sister-in-law hung on her words, and wondered. A couple of months ago she would not have known what was meant by there being two Mauds. But she knew now; those weeks in Scotland had given her the deeper self, without in the least destroy-

ing the more superficial self. She felt the joy of morning and evening, the rapturous expectation of catching sea-trout just as keenly as ever, but an interior life had awakened in her. Lily, with her husband and her children, of course knew that; she had no fear of being misunderstood.

“ I used to envy you so, Lily,” she said, “ for I thought that the ‘ you ’ which all the world knew and admired was all there was. But since—well, yes, since I have fallen in love, I know there is a more real *you* than that; a ‘ you ’ that is more essential. I don’t think that that part of you is happy, any more than Thurso is happy.”

Lily sat down again, and before she spoke she thought over her words.

“ I would give, or give up, a great deal to make Thurso happy,” she said. “ But I don’t think we are happy together. I get on his nerves.”

Maud looked up at her, as if waiting for more. More came.

“ And he bores me,” said Lily.

There was a long silence; bees visited the flowers, making them bend and sway and murmur to their buzzing; a grasshopper clicked and whirred on the lawn, swifts swooped and chided together in sliding companies. Then, such is the tragic habit of the world, it struck them both how unlike themselves, unlike the ordinary presentment of themselves, that is to say, they were

being, and simultaneously they swam up out of their subaqueous depths. But the return to normal life was short; they soon went down again, since those who once have met below always go back there. It is only those who have talked insincerely on deep matters who prefer to meet on the surface. But a few surface remarks followed.

“It is always one’s own fault if one is bored,” said Lily. “It shows only that a bore is present, who is probably one’s self. Yet, Maud, if I tell him about all the bazaars and sales and so on, *he* is bored. And they do make up a big part of my life.”

“On the surface,” said she, “if we are being frank.”

“No, not on the surface; the deepest and most real part of me is sorry for poor things, and it expresses itself thus. And it is exactly that which gets on his nerves. If I get up from lunch before I have eaten anything, because I have to go to something of the sort, I get on his nerves by doing so. He thinks I am restless. In a way, I am restless. I want to do something for other people rather than eat cutlets myself. What do you want me to do? What does he want me to do? Eat opium instead with him?”

Maud gave a long sigh.

“Oh, that was a pity,” she said.

“ Yes, it was a pity; our attitude toward each other is a pity. But let us be practical. I always want to be practical. What am I to do about a hundred things? ”

Lily got up again. She was, as she had said, always practical, and she was always restless. This afternoon, in particular, after her inconclusive watchfulness of the night before, she longed to pin herself down, or to be pinned down to a course of conduct. She wanted a definite policy, and though she never had consulted Maud before, she had an idea that Maud, as she was now, might perhaps indicate one. And again the bees buzzed and swayed in the flowers. There came a crisper sound, the sound of crunched gravel; the gate swung open, and a dog-cart drew up at the front door, some fifty yards from where they were sitting. There was a young man in it, who held the horse's bridle, while with the other hand he rang the bell. He waited a reasonable time, and then rang again.

“ I will see what it is,” said Lady Thurso, and walked across the lawn to the house. But as she went her heart sank, she already guessed by a sort of intuition, for her guess could be founded upon no process of reasoning what was coming.

She had a word with the driver, who put a small package into her hand, and touched his hat

and went off again. Then Lady Thurso came back to where Maud was sitting.

"It is directed to Thurso," she said, "and it is from that chemist in Windsor."

Maud did not reply at once.

"Yes; open it carefully," she said, "so that if it is not what we think we can do it up again. It seems rather mean, but I don't care. I'll open it, if you like."

Lily seemed to think this unnecessary, and undid it herself. There was a bottle of dark blue glass inside, with a red label of "Poison" on it. It had a glass stopper, and she drew this out and smelled it. Then she passed it to Maud.

Maud put the stopper back in the bottle, squeezed up the paper and string in which it had been wrapped into a tight ball, and threw it deep into the flower bed. Then she went to the opening in the yew hedge and flung the bottle itself into mid-stream.

Then she came back to her sister-in-law.

"So we've both had a hand in it," she said. "And last night he let you throw the stuff out of the window, and the very next day goes and orders some more. Poor, dear old boy! He must have ordered it when he went in with Theodosia after lunch to-day. Oh, Lily, you asked just now what you were to do. There's something for you to do! Somehow stop that!"



"It is directed to Thurso," she said, "and it is from that chemist in Windsor." Chapter VI.

“ How? ”

“ I don't know. We must find a way. Any means, fair or foul, is fair. It's ruin, its damnation! And that bottle: do we know anything about it or not? ”

The practical side of Lily came to the fore.

“ The chemist's man will say he gave it me,” she said, “ but there is no reason why you should come into it.”

“ Ah, give me my share. Let me help if I can,” said Maud quickly.

“ Of course, you can help, though I am willing to bear the whole responsibility of what we have done,” said Lily.

“ No, I want it to come from both of us,” said Maud, “ if you think that is any use.”

The utmost. You have more weight with him than I have.”

“ Ah, then let me help,” said Maud, “ and, Lily, we won't let him find out what we have done. Let us tell him.”

“ He will be furious,” said Lily.

“ He will be more rightly furious if he is left to ferret it out for himself. Then he will confront us with what we have done, instead of our confronting him. Besides, we don't want to conceal what we have done, even if we could. We are not ashamed of it. We would do it again;

we would do anything to prevent such bottles reaching him."

People began to gather again soon after this. Count Villars and his companion returned from the river, Lord Yardly, looking considerably refreshed, as if his letter-writing had been some unconscious recuperative process, came out from indoors, and a few people from neighboring houses motored or drove over for tea, and when Thurso and the two Americans returned from Windsor there was a considerable gathering on the lawn. He went into the house before joining the others, and was away some minutes, during which they could hear a bell ring furiously within. Lily's and Maud's eyes met over this, and when a few minutes later Thurso came out, again a moment's silent telegraphy passed between them, and Maud got up and went straight to him as he came across the lawn. Lily could not leave her guests and the tea-table, but she watched them. They were not far distant, and Thurso's face was towards her. She saw it go suddenly white, as it did when he was angry, and then he turned and went back towards the house again, without joining them. He did not go in, but walked down the road that led to the stables.

Some minutes later Thurso was urging his cob mercilessly toward Windsor. The first flame of anger against his sister and Lily for robbing him

of his latest supply of the drug was fast merging into suspense as to whether the chemist had kept the prescription for it or had returned it with the bottle.

In the latter case, of course, prescription and phial must have been thrown away together; and the problem of securing a new prescription arose.

Arrived at the chemist's he was out of the cart at a bound and, passing under the colored lamp, gained the interior of the shop.

An assistant hurried forward to wait on him. The Earl glanced nervously about, but the man who had put up the prescription for him was not in sight.

"Where is your employer?" asked Thurso brusquely.

"Mr. Deckle? He's at his tea, sir. Can I——?"

"I left a prescription with him. Does he send prescriptions with his packages or does he keep them on file?"

"The originals are sent, sir. But copies are kept on file."

"Very good. Please duplicate my——"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'm not a prescription clerk. I am not qualified to——"

"Is there another chemist's near here?"

"Only one, sir. About a half mile down the

High Street. But Mr. Deckle will be back in an hour or——”

Thurso did not wait to hear the end of the apologetic explanation. Five minutes later he was at the second chemist's—a less pretentious shop in a poorer locality.

An elderly man with bleared, near-sighted eyes was in charge of the place. It was evident from his greeting that the Earl was a stranger to him. This fact gave Thurso a desire-born inspiration. Fumbling in his pockets he muttered:

“How very annoying! I've left my prescription pad in another coat. Give me a blank.”

A less near-sighted or more observant man than the chemist must have noted the furtive, over-anxious look of the pseudo-physician. But the shopkeeper without suspicion laid before his customer the required blank and fountain pen.

Thurso, by a supreme effort of memory, recalled the exact terms, phraseology and appearance of his missing prescription, and with laborious carelessness began to write the duplicate.

“So you're a physician, sir?” queried the chemist, with the garrulity of an old and solitary man.

Thurso nodded, relieved at the credulity in his interlocutor's voice.

“Then,” pursued the other, “maybe you wouldn't mind deciding a bit of a dispute me and

my assistant had this morning. He's studying surgery and he thinks he knows it all. It's a good many years since I dabbled in anything of the sort, but I fancy I can pose him yet. Now, the point we argued was: is the partial paralysis that sometimes accompanies cerebral typhoid a true hemiplægia or just a functional symptom of the disease? Now, I claim that it's functional and nothing more. But that thick head of an assistant——”

“You're right. Perfectly right!” broke in Thurso, his palms and forehead wet with nervousness at the dangerous position wherein he found himself. He bent again to the task of writing the prescription, his hand shaking uncontrollably.

The clamor of fifty voices rising suddenly just outside the pharmacy door completed his confusion. He turned peevishly to learn the cause of the trouble and encountered a stream of excited men and boys hastening into the place, all talking, shouting and explaining in fifty different keys. In the midst of the rabble two constables bore a groaning figure on a stretcher. A third was busy hustling the crowd outdoors, where they gathered flattening their noses against the dingy glass and striving to peer through the dim recesses within.

“Run over by a motor car on the road just below,” reported one of the constables as the chemist hurried from behind the counter and began to

run practised fingers over the writhing navvy on the stretcher. "We sent for a doctor but he was out, and the surgeon down at the station is away on another accident case. So we brought him in here. Any bones broken?"

The little chemist had straightened himself up, and now spoke in a sort of pleased excitement.

"Yes," he said. "Looks to me like a compound fracture of the tibia, and it's bad enough to call for immediate attention if he wants to save his leg. You're lucky, my man!" he resumed, addressing the navvy, "for there's a physician right here to hand. A good one, too," he added with a smirk and bow to the horrified Thurso, "to judge from his knowledge of hemiplægia. Doctor, will you look over the case? I've all the appliances here for bone-setting."

The constables respectfully made way for the Earl. The suffering man on the stretcher ceased to groan and turned on him bloodshot eyes that held the dumb appeal and trust of a hurt dog. The look went through Thurso like a white-hot iron. He stood inert, nerveless.

"Excuse me, sir!" said the chemist timidly, "but I think there's no time to wait. The man is in great pain and——"

Thurso's first impulse was to declare that he was no physician and that the chemist had been mistaken in thinking he had claimed to be one.

But there, on the counter, lay the half-written prescription to give him the lie. There, too, at his side, were three officers of the law. Of the law that he had transgressed in usurping the right to practise medical lore. His brain went blank. The navy, reading bewilderment in his glance, broke out again in a series of nerve-wracking moans. The constables looked stolidly expectant.

For the moment, Thurso's craving for the drug that had led him into such a predicament turned to loathing. He felt like an animal in a trap.

"Wait!" he gasped, his voice harsh and lifeless. "I—I must get my medical chest."

"There's no need of—" began the chemist; but Thurso was gone. Snatching up his half-finished prescription he was out of the door, shouldering his way through the crowd that parted respectfully for him, gained his cart, and with one leap was on the seat and driving down the High Street like mad.

Nor did he pause nor look back until he turned the sweating horse over to a groom at his own gate.

* * * * *

Maud came back to the tea-table, dropped into a chair next Lily and waited till she could speak to her.

"He has gone back to Windsor to get some

more," she said. "He would not listen to me. He is frightfully angry with us."

Lady Thurso just nodded, and then, since whatever private tragedy was going on the public comedy had to be kept up, she devoted herself again to a hostess's duties.

Meantime the tinkle of drawing-room philosophy went on round her, and she joined in it with that facility that was always hers.

"Yes, it is quite certain we must have some fad which for the time being we take as the most serious thing in the world," she said to Lady Swindon, who had come down the river from Cookham. "Two years ago, do you remember, it was no hats, and that was followed by the simple life."

Lady Swindon laughed.

"I know, and we gave that up because it proved to be so frightfully complicated," she said. "One had to provide two sorts of lunches and two sorts of dinners every day, one for the simple life people, who ate lentils and all the most expensive fruits, but no meat, and one for the complicated life, which didn't mind what it ate as long as there was beef. Swindon always ate both, to show he wasn't bigoted either way. Besides, one really couldn't afford it. And what is the next fad, darling Lily? You always are half through a fad before anybody else has heard of it."

“Deep breathing I have tried,” said Lady Thurso, “but it takes too long. You see you can’t talk as you are deep breathing, whereas you could when you were eating lentils. Perhaps it will be Christian Science, though, do you know, I think the real thing is too serious and sensible, and the spurious thing too silly ever to become a fad. But ask Maud to tell you about Mr. Cochran and the typhoid up in Caithness.”

“I will. And where’s Thurso? Isn’t he here?”

“Oh, yes, but tea-time isn’t his hour. Tea, Theodosia?”

Theodosia had truly American ideas about being introduced. It was her custom to make all her guests formally known to each other, and she expected the same treatment.

“Kindly introduce me, Lily,” she said.

“Lady Swindon, my cousin, Mrs. Moreton.”

“Very happy to make your acquaintance, Lady Swindon,” said she, “and don’t you think that Lady Thurso’s place down here is just the cunningest you ever saw? Why, look at that yew hedge! It must have been planted before the flood to have grown like that. But then all she has is just perfect, isn’t it? My! I never saw such a beautiful black pearl as that you’re wearing. It looks as if it came straight from the Marquis of Anglesea’s tie.”

“ Oh, no, I inherited it,” said Lady Swindon rather icily.

“ That’s what comes of being an English-woman,” said Theodosia. “ You inherit things and we’ve got to buy them. Silas and I and Lord Thurso drove to Windsor this afternoon. Do you know my husband? Ah, he’s talking to Count Villars over there. But we had the loveliest time; I never saw Windsor before, and fancy inheriting that! But I’m afraid Lord Thurso is sick; he called at a chemist’s, and bought some medicine to be sent back here at once. I guess he pined for that medicine. Has he come out here? No, I don’t see him. I guess he’s taking it now. Lily, I think your husband is the loveliest man! ”

Lily got up; the whole situation was beginning to get on her nerves most terribly. Theodosia, with her frightfully middle-class manner, was on her nerves; it was on her nerves too that Lady Swindon should think that Theodosia was a typical American, whereas she was a parody, the parody with which Europe (only she would have called it Eurōpe) is most familiar. And Lady Swindon, for all her “ darling Lily,” was one of those true friends who like knowing your weak points. Theodosia, as she was aware, as she got up to talk to other of her guests, was a weak point; mention of Thurso’s medicine was a weak

point; Theodosia touched them all with the unerring instinct of the true bungler. And with the courage that wants not to know the worst, which is so much superior to the cowardice that thinks it is brave when it asks to know the worst, she deliberately moved out of ear-shot.

Lady Swindon justified her position as a true friend. The fads which she had been so eager to hear about were quite dismissed. She proceeded in the spirit of true inquiry, which wants to know.

“What a nice afternoon you must have had!” she said. “To see Windsor for the first time is delightful, is it not? And to have Lord Thurso as a companion is delightful at any time. But he is not ill, is he?”

“He seemed hungry for that chemist,” said Theodosia, “and he seemed just starving to get back here. I’m told you have a speed limit for motors over here, but if we didn’t exceed it I don’t see the use of your having one.”

Now Lady Swindon was not malicious; she was also a great admirer of Lily’s. But she could not resist her hideous instinct to know, to be abreast of things, which in London ensures a greater success than other and more agreeable qualities give.

“Dear Thurso,” she said, “he has such dread-

ful headaches. No wonder he wanted his medicine, if he had one."

"Silas used to have dreadful headaches," said Theodosia. "They arose from dyspepsia, to which he is a martyr. But opium always unmartyred him."

"Ah, opium!" said Lady Swindon.

"Yes. Why, there's Count Villars. Count Villars, I haven't set eyes on you since lunch. May I introduce you to Lady Swindon?"

Villars bowed.

"I think we were introduced some years ago," he said. "How are you, Lady Swindon? You have come down from Cookham?"

Lady Swindon got up, turning her back on Theodosia.

"Yes, and I am just going back there. How clever of you to remember where we live! Take me to my boat, will you? Let us walk round the garden first."

They strolled a few yards down the path between the two tall herbaceous borders before she spoke.

"And you are staying here?" she asked. "How do you find Lily? I am sure you walked together last night after dinner, and joined old memories on to the present."

But she had met her match this time.

"Yes, dear lady," he said, "we found that the

two needed no link. We had always been excellent friends, and found that we remained so. As always, I adore her; as always, she receives my adoration from her infinite height. The Madonna still smiles on her worshipper. He asks no more."

For the moment she was startled from her rôle of earnest inquirer.

"Indeed, I thought you had once asked more," she said. "We all supposed so."

"There is no limit to what people of brilliant and vivid imagination may not suppose," said he.

She could not help smiling; his refusals to give direct answers were always so very silken.

"And the truth always exceeds one's imagination, does it not?" she said. Then she sank her voice.

"And Thurso," she went on. "How do you think he is?"

Villars looked at her in bland surprise.

"Very well, surely, is he not?" he said.

Lady Swindon was afraid there was no more to be got there. She made the best of it, however.

"Oh, I am so glad, so *very* glad," she said.

He handed her into her launch.

"Do come to us one Sunday," she begged. "I will try to persuade Lily to come also."

Lady Swindon's departure had acted as a signal for a general move, and when he got back

Lady Thurso was just saying good-by to the last of her guests. As the last carriage drove off, the butler spoke to her.

"His lordship begs that you and Lady Maud will go to his room as soon as you are disengaged, my lady," he said.

"Tell his lordship we will come immediately. Ah, Count Villars, we were going on the river, were we not? Could you wait a few minutes? Thurso wants to see me about something."

Maud joined her from the lawn, and they went together to Thurso's private sitting-room at the end of the house. He was sitting at his table in the window, and with his usual courtesy got up as they entered. On the table in front of him was a package containing a bottle of dark blue glass. He had just finished undoing this when they came in.

"A cigarette, Lily?" he said. "I want ten minutes' talk."

She took one; he waited till she had lit it.

"Maud tells me that you and she undid a package that arrived here this afternoon, addressed to me, and threw it away. Are either of you in the habit of doing such things, may I ask? Do you open other people's letters?"

"Thurso, don't be a fool," said Maud quietly. His face went very white for a moment.

“ Maud, I am trying to be courteous. You might make an effort to follow my example.”

“ Is it courteous to ask Lily and me if we open other people’s letters? ” she asked.

“ It seems to me that your behavior this afternoon warrants my question.”

“ No, Thurso, it does not,” said Lily, “ and you know it.”

He looked first at one, then at the other, and his hand moved slowly towards the bottle on the table.

“ I don’t want to make a scene with either of you,” he said, “ and I don’t want to detain you. But I require you both to promise never again to act in such a way. You are absolutely unjustified in touching or interfering with my things in this way, from whatever motive. And your interference has done no good, as you see, in this instance, and will do no good in any other. You will merely oblige me to adopt methods as underhand as your own.”

“ There was nothing underhand,” said Lily; “ we were going to tell you what we had done. Maud did tell you.”

“ It was inevitable that I should find out,” said he.

“ That was immaterial,” said Maud. “ Even if you could never have found out otherwise, we should have told you.”

“ Ah! ” said he.

Maud looked at him with amazement. She had been told by Lily this afternoon that there were two Mauds; here indeed was a Thurso whom she would scarcely have known for her brother. He was fundamentally different, while his quiet manner and superficial conduct were the same. But this new Thurso was as if a devil possessed him; she felt, too, that he hated her.

In his one word of reply there was an ocean of incredulity.

“ You don’t believe what I say? ” she asked.

He was silent, he smiled a little, and raised his eyebrows. There was no need for him to speak; his meaning was perfectly clear.

“ Then what is the use of our giving you any promise for the future, if you don’t believe what we say? ” she asked.

“ I ask for your promise, however,” he said.

“ And if we don’t give it you? ” asked Lily.

“ I shall merely have to find some other way of getting things delivered, so that you do not intercept them,” he said.

There was nothing more to be said on the subject, and they sat in silence a moment. Then Maud spoke.

“ I promise,” she said. “ It is no good refusing.”

“ And I,” said Lily.

Thurso put his hand to his head suddenly with a gesture he could not control.

“Then shall we agree never to say a word more on this very unpleasant subject?” he said. “And now, Lily, and you, Maud, listen. I am suffering so hideously at this present moment that I hardly know what I am saying—agitation, anger, and so on brought on this afternoon the worst pain I have ever had. I very likely should not have taken laudanum from that bottle you threw away; anyhow, I should have struggled hard not to. I struggled yesterday, with the result that I allowed Lily to pour away all I had in the house. But I am not going to struggle now; the pain is absolutely intolerable, and it was brought on, as far as I know, by what you did. Your interference has not done the slightest good; it has only given me an hour of hell. I have thought and said abominable things of you both in this last hour. My only excuse is that I am in torments. I beg the forgiveness of both of you.”

Here was the real Thurso again, looking out like a soul in prison, trying to burst through the bars, and it was indescribably pathetic. Both women were melted with pity for him; and Lily got up and came to him.

“Ah, Thurso, of course we forgive you,” she said; “but to-morrow you will go on fighting

against this, won't you? " and she pointed to the bottle. " It's—it's damnation, you know."

He looked at her with agonized eyes.

" I will do my best," he said. " Now, go! Make my excuses to the others, if I don't appear at dinner. But I will come if I am fit."

The two went out together, but before the door was closed they heard the clink of glass.

CHAPTER VII

IT was a chill November afternoon in the same year, and Lily was seated in her private room at Thurso House, writing busily and fiercely, as if to absorb herself in what she was doing. Her secretary, to whom she had dictated replies to some fifty letters less private than those she was herself engaged on, had just left her, but this pile which stood by her on her table she felt she had better answer herself.

The room where she sat was one of her own private suite, which she occupied when, as now, she had come hurriedly to London, meaning only to stop a day or two, and do some necessary business, and it was not worth while to open the whole house. There was a bedroom and bathroom belonging to it, and another small sitting-room, where she had her meals. Before that she had been paying visits for a month since she came down from Scotland, and Thurso had as far as she knew been doing the same, though in other houses, and this week—she had been here ten days now—they were to have entertained at their house in Norfolk. But the party had had to be put off. For on her arrival suddenly at Thurso House,

she had found that her husband was already here—he had been here for a fortnight alone, just with his valet and a couple of maid-servants, one to cook, one to clean up. He had excused himself from the houses where he was to stay, and had come here to live in the hell-paradise of opium. Lady Thurso had telegraphed for Maud, who was more use than anybody else with her brother, and the two had been here now for ten days.

Since last June the habit had gained on him with awful strides; for a few months after that he had, she knew, made frantic efforts to throw it off. He had seen doctors, he had done all that there lay in his power to do. But with fearful rapidity a sort of atrophy of his will had set in. He had soon no longer wished or desired to be a free man again, and though his will had so completely been dominated by the drug, it had left the calculating, scheming part of his brain untouched, and in order to obtain the drug, since the chemists with whom he habitually dealt had been ordered not to give it him, he had gone to others. Then, about a month ago, he had made what seemed to be the very last effort of his will, and in Lily's presence had burned the prescription which enabled him to obtain it. But three days had not elapsed after that before he himself forged another, and Lord Thurso, calling suddenly at some big pharmacy, in great pain,

with a prescription bearing an eminent doctor's name, was naturally not refused the dark blue bottle with its poison label.

Yet busily as Lady Thurso dealt with her correspondence, striving, since at the moment she could do nothing for her husband, to occupy her mind anyhow, rather than let it dwell on the hideous reality of what was going on, she was alert for the interruption she expected. For this morning Thurso had suddenly collapsed, and for an hour or two they thought he was dying. But the doctors had pulled him round out of immediate danger, and Sir James Sanderson, after an hour's absence, had come back again and was with him now. He had promised to make his report to Lady Thurso before he left the house.

Her pen went rapidly from top to bottom of the paper, and envelope after envelope joined the letters already written. Awful as the present was, yet, in a sense, now that a crisis like this had come, it was more bearable in thought than those growing anxieties and torments she had suffered in the past. For with the growth of the habit, his moral perception, like his will, had seemed to leave him. He had conceived wholly baseless suspicions against his wife; he had uttered them; he had forbidden the house to Count Villars. He had spied on her, he had opened her letters, both those which she wrote and those which she re-

ceived—he who a few months ago had exacted from her a promise not to open his. Then from being suspicious of others himself, suspicion ripening into certainty had arisen against him. He made long absences, when he was not at the house or at his club, and gave palpably false accounts of his days when he returned. Finally, he had brought to Thurso House, while his wife was in it, a common woman off the street.

But the crisis which had occurred this morning—the crisis that concerned life and death—had mitigated the horror of these things. It had mitigated also the acuteness of another question. Since June last she had known that Villars loved her now, just as he had always loved her, and though, being a gentleman, to put the matter broadly, he had not traded on her growing disgust at the man who was her husband, it was impossible for her not to know that her lover had moved closer. She had no moral code of defence. There was nothing of that kind that prevented her letting the man who loved her and who was, after all, the only man she had ever loved, become in deed what both he and she knew that he was in all else but that. Nothing, except her blind determination that this should not be so, stood in the way. Thurso had taunted her again and again with a lie, he could not taunt her more if it had been a truth. Indeed, to taunt her, as Thurso had done,

with what was not true, was more unbearable to her than if it had been. Had Villars been her lover, she almost felt as if she would have hurled the truth of it herself in Thurso's face. For her actions never ran away with her; she was not in the habit of doing what she was ashamed of afterwards, and certainly, so she felt, if she had taken a step, so momentous, so vitally concerned with her life, as having a lover, she was sure that she would not have done so blindly in any heat of passion. Had she meant to live that double life, she would have done so deliberately, and for reasons which would have seemed to her excellent—firstly, that her husband was opium-drenched; secondly, that she loved Villars, and thirdly, that she would not have believed it was wicked. Had Villars been her lover, it would have been because she did not see any moral reason why he should not be. And though in judging others, as has been said, she had no moral code, yet she judged herself, it seemed, by stricter laws, though all-unformulated, than she applied to her friends. She wanted everybody to have a good time; but she would not take the species of "good time" that others might choose, and make it her own.

It seemed to her that she had only been subjected to the anticipation of the rack; the rack itself was yet to come. For Rudolf Villars was (though he was the rack also) her one stand-by

in this awful passage through which the inscrutable Master of Souls was leading her. Maud was splendid, she could not have done without Maud either; but Maud was a woman, and she was a woman and Villars was a man. Therefore, he could help her in a way that Maud could not. For humankind is created male and female, and those of different sex can and must help each other in a manner impossible to those of the same sex. That is the glory of the world, and its shame.

So day by day she owed more to Villars, and her debt was mounting into huge figures. And though she knew well that to him it was non-existent—he never, anyhow, added it up—and it was fearfully existent to her. In payment of it she could only give him one thing, herself, and that she would not. But in the intimacy which had shot up again, a mature growth this time, from the root of their boy-and-girl affection, he must have seen, she knew, the apparent inconsistency of her attitude. She did not judge or condemn, she did not really disapprove in the case of others of that which she refused him. True he had made no declaration of his love for her, but it was only the instinctive knowledge that to do so was quite useless that restrained him. But day by day it was getting harder for him to be silent. And what would happen then? Would she be strong enough to withstand him? For the

moment, however, the acuteness of these perplexities had lost their point since Thurso's collapse this morning, and, torturing as that anxiety was, it was less wearing than the other.

But these thoughts, the summary of her inner life for the last two or three months, did not now get between her pen and her paper. She had to answer these letters, inquiring about her husband, regretting her absence from various parties and gatherings, and she had to answer them with the knowledge that the world knew what was the matter with him. Some people thought he had taken to drink, others that he had taken to drugs, and since nobody said such things to her, she had to frame her answers carefully. But it was no longer any use to pretend that nothing was wrong—the whole world knew that something was wrong. Thus these letters required a “deal” of answering.

But the interruption for which she had been waiting soon came, and Sir James Sanderson bustled cheerfully into the room. He looked extraordinarily unlike an eminent doctor, but exactly like a P. and O. Captain, dressed rather absurdly. He had a toothbrush mustache, a bronzed, ruddy face, and wore a black frock coat, with yellow boots, and a red tie. He was awkward, cheerful and embarrassed, and played golf whenever possible, which was not often, with the

enthusiasm of boyhood and remarkable inability. But, incidentally, he had saved more lives and restored more health, which he thought far more important, than any other three doctors put together.

He shook hands with Lady Thurso, and sat down on a small chair, which broke into fragments beneath him, leaving him couched among splinters on the floor. He quite distinctly said, "Oh, damn!" and struggled to his feet.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Lily. "I hope you are not hurt."

And though this farcical introduction was utterly unintended by the doctor, she felt rather more courageous.

"Not in the least, but the chair is," he said. "Yes, I have been with Lord Thurso for the last hour."

He found another seat.

"Now, be brave," he said.

Then his skill in dealing with people was apparent. There was dreadful news to tell; but in spite of the obsolescence of the expression "breaking news" news could still be broken. It was wise to stab like that, to say "be brave," and then, since he knew he was dealing with a brave woman, to wait for her recovery, which would come.

"I know I am allowed to smoke a cigarette,"

he said, "though it is most unprofessional. Do take one of mine."

There was the moment's pause of lighting. Lily's courage sank away after his first words like the mercury exposed to a temperature of zero. Then, in the pause, she braced herself again. It was that he had been waiting for.

"Lord Thurso has lived through six hours, when he might have died any moment," he said. "That shows he has a fine constitution. This attack of syncope—failure of the heart—was enough to kill most people. It has not killed him, and he will not now die of this attack. He may have other attacks, but I don't see why he should, unless he provokes them himself."

He flicked the end off his cigarette.

"That is the bright side," he said. "There is the other side. Opium, I suppose—laudanum, morphia, it is all one. But, as far as you know, has he lost the power to will? My dear lady, tell me everything. I guess a good deal from what I have seen. And—now you must be brave—there is nothing which you can tell me which will be worse than what I conjecture."

But as she spoke, though he attended very carefully to all she said, he watched her not for that reason alone. It was very likely, he saw, that he would soon have another patient on his hands.

Then she began. She concealed nothing of what

was within her knowledge, and she exaggerated nothing. She told of the secret dose which Maud had seen Thurso take in the train, she told him of Maud's previous suspicion—a suspicion only. She told him also of the original cause of his taking laudanum at all—namely, those overmastering headaches. At that, for the only time, he interrupted her.

“Quite so,” he said. “I gave him the prescription myself.”

Then the tale became harder of telling. She told him of the intercepted bottle, of the growth of his suspicions of her, and the certainty of her suspicion of him, of the crowning insult. And when she had finished there was silence.

She was prepared now—there was no reason to break or conceal things.

“The opium-habit, even when one takes it quite early,” he said, “is the most difficult thing in the world to cure—give me ten drunkards, and I will cure eight, but give me ten opium-eaters, and I may cure one. God knows why it is so, Lady Thurso, but this particular drug, this poppy of the field, binds body and soul in a way that nothing else—not alcohol or sensualism—binds. And your husband's case has not been taken early; it has been taken, as far as I am concerned, at the last gasp, when he was nearly dying.”

“And now be brave again,” he said. “He

might have died this morning. It might have been better if he had. It might have saved suffering and misery to himself and those about him. Of course one cannot, and I do not, say that any case is incurable, because, thank God, miracles do happen. But as he gets stronger again from this attack, so, too, will his craving for the drug get stronger. Unless you absolutely shut him up, he will find means of getting it, and he will probably begin with small doses again. Then he will increase them and increase them till this happens once more."

"But if one succeeded in keeping him away from it by any means?" asked Lily.

"He would probably go mad. It is not the time for me to keep anything from you, dear lady. Thank Heaven, you are a brave woman, and you are bearing it all as—well, as I think we are meant to bear things. We may get white with pain, we may feel sick with the anguish of it all, but we can clench our teeth at any rate, and the very effort to be decent, to be brave, always and inevitably brings its own reward. All such efforts strengthen our characters, just as gymnastics strengthen our muscles."

Something in this arrested her. She was led away from Thurso for a moment to another matter that concerned her just as vitally.

"Do you mean that if—if we resist anything,

our powers of resistance are increased?" she asked.

Sir James took in this also. His eye, trained to observe obscurities, saw she was not thinking for the moment of her husband.

"Certainly that is so," he said, "just as the absence of resistance, the yielding, weakens our power of resistance. The strong body is built up by resisting, and so I venture to say is the strong soul."

She thought about that for a moment, noting down, so to speak, in her mind how it concerned that of which the doctor knew nothing.

"Tell me all you fear about Thurso," she said quietly. "Tell me what you think the end will be, and when. I gather that you regard him as incurable; in fact, you have said so. Now I want to hear from you quietly and fully what I must bring myself to expect."

"I have told you the worst," he said, "and I think you understand it. But more in detail, it is this: He will be very weak for a day or two, and will, of course, have to remain in bed. But I fully expect that his recovery from this attack will be comparatively rapid, because the predisposing cause, opium, is no longer at work, but as he gets stronger, as I said, the craving will get stronger."

"Then you advise——"

“ I advise nothing till I see how he pulls round after this. It is his mind, his will-power, that has been atrophied, made ineffective by this drug. He—I am telling you my worst fears, of course, because this is not a time to buoy you up with false hopes—he is incapable of resistance, so I fear, from what you tell me. That is the real and fatal danger. Now is there any motive, any thought or desire or aim, that was his, which we can make use of, on which, so to speak, we can prop up and train this will-power which is lying helpless like a creeper that has been torn from its supports? His—his devotion to you, for example? His love for his children? ”

She shook her head, and the Dead Sea was in that gesture for bitterness.

The doctor spoke again, gently, tenderly.

“ Then who has the most influence over him? ” he asked.

“ Oh, Maud,” said she. “ His sister, you know, Lady Maud Stratton. I have no doubt about that.”

She spoke without bitterness, but the simplicity of her tone was more pathetic to the kind man who had to ask these questions, since his business was to cure his patients, than any bitterness could have been.

“ Then may I consult with her before I go,” said he, “ as to any possibility that she knows of,

of presenting some motive to her brother for living. He is sinking, he must sink as far as purely medical skill can help him, and so we want, do we not, to throw any life-buoy to him, anything that will keep him afloat."

"Hypnotism, that sort of thing?" she asked.

"It is inconceivable that hypnotism or suggestion can help him," said he. "There must be something to hypnotize, something to suggest to, and that something is will-power. That, in Lord Thurso, as I feel sure, is practically destroyed."

Though Lily had taken this all so quietly, her quietude was partly that of some one who is stunned, and now her mind recurred, as she recovered herself, to the moment when the stunning blow had been delivered.

"You mean then that it is only a miracle that can save him?" she added.

"Yes, but I believe in miracles," said he, "though one cannot, unfortunately, summon a miracle to one's aid."

She got up quickly.

"How strange you should say that!" she remarked. "Because Maud believes in them, as you do. Only she no longer calls them miracles, she calls them 'Christian Science.'"

Sir James could not have looked cynical or sneering if he had tried, and certainly he did not try. But his tone was exceedingly dry.

“ The lady in Boston? ” he observed.

Lady Thurso got up. “ No, a man in Caithness,” she said. “ I will ring; she shall come and tell you, if she is in.”

“ Ah, one moment yet, please. I want to talk for a moment about you. Lady Thurso, you are on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I have been looking at you and watching you. You have had a terrible time, and you are not finished with it yet. It has told on you more than you can guess, though you are bearing it with a gallantry that I respect and admire. But are you not taxing your strength more than you need? ”

Her eyes went to the writing-table, near which, on the floor, was the pack of her answered letters.

“ You mean I had better sit down and think over all this terrible tragedy,” she said, her voice beginning to break a little, “ rather than find relief from it in forgetting, by means of employment? ”

“ No, I do not pin myself down to say that you must not answer your letters, but I very strongly advise you to rest yourself as far as is possible, and to avoid anything agitating beyond that which you must bear. There is plenty that you must bear, that you as your husband’s wife have got to bear. But if there is anything else, I entreat you don’t be at home to it. Exercise *your* will-power and make it stronger by resistance. Save

yourself from anything else that may worry or tire you. I speak, of course, quite at random, but I feel sure from your magnificent bravery over what I have had to tell you that you have other worries."

Then, quite suddenly, the breaking-point came for her. All these months of ceaseless anxiety about Thurso had worn her nerves to fiddle-strings; all her life, too, she, with her splendid constitution, which never told her how tired she was, had been living on the extreme limits of her powers, and simultaneously with her husband's mental and physical ruin had come the regret and glory of her life. She had loved once and had scarcely known it, she loved now and was loved, and renounced it.

She gave a sudden shriek of laughter that did not sound like mirth.

"Oh, you conjurers!" she cried. "Doctors are like X-rays, are they not? Good Heavens! I have enough to try me, and you don't guess the half. If it were only Thurso, why, I could bear it."

Sir James got up quickly, placed himself directly in front of her, and clapped his hands violently close to her face.

"Now, none of that," he said. "I haven't come here to listen to hysterical ravings. Make

an effort! Pull yourself together. I'm ashamed of you!"

Lady Thurso checked suddenly in the middle of her sentence; two or three tears, the precursors of the hysterical storm that had been on the point of bursting, had found their way on to her cheeks, and she wiped them off. The attack was averted in mid-career, and she stood silent a moment, still hearing the reverberation of his clapped hands.

"Yes, quite right," she said. "Thank you very much."

Sir James waited a moment till he felt certain of her. Then he took one of her hands and kissed it.

"You dear, brave woman," he said.

She was quiet again now, and sat down in the chair from which she had jumped up.

"Never mind me," she said. "I can manage my own private affairs. Oh, there are some. But I give you my word I can do it."

"Of course, you can. I only warned you that some management was necessary. Now!"

He paused a moment.

"Now about this man in Caithness," he said. "I understand that Lord Thurso was there this summer, and Lady Maud was with him. I am not bigoted. These Christian Scientists have got hold of a big truth, only they mix a lot of nonsense up with it—at least some of them do. They

tell me that if you have a compound fracture and only say to yourself that compound fractures don't really exist, the bones will come together, like the bones in Ezekiel. That is silly. But about this man in Caithness——”

Lady Thurso got up again, quietly this time.

“ I will see if Maud is in,” she said. “ There was very virulent typhoid up there in the summer. Mr. Cochran is believed by her to have cured one or two cases. In fact, she believes more than that.”

She rang the bell, and in the interval before it was answered only two words were spoken.

“ Spare yourself,” said Sir James.

Maud had come in half an hour ago, but hearing that her sister-in-law was with the doctor, had not interrupted them. And, as she entered now, Lady Thurso got up and shook hands with Sir James.

“ Maud, this is Sir James Sanderson,” she said. “ He wants to talk to you. Good-by, Sir James, I shall see you, of course, to-morrow morning.”

She left the room, and Maud was alone with the doctor. She had no idea what he wanted to talk about, and waited, wondering why Lily had gone. Then he told her.

“ Lady Maud,” he said, “ I want to hear about Caithness and the typhoid, and Mr. Cochran.”

Here was the directness of the P. & O. Captain again. It was exactly as if he had given orders to the engine-room.

“ What for? ” she asked very simply, taking off her gloves.

“ Your brother,” said he.

Maud told him, as simply as Lily had told him, of the course of Thurso’s disease; what had happened, as far as she knew, in Caithness. She did not preach about it, she drew no moral from it; she merely said what had happened to Duncan’s wife, what had happened to Sandy Mackenzie, what had happened to the whole outbreak of typhoid. Then he asked one question.

“ Do you believe it was the direct power of God,” he said, “ in Whose presence all sickness and illness and pain cannot exist? ”

“ I think I believe it,” said she.

“ But you are not sure? ”

“ Not quite.”

He thought in silence over this for some time.

“ Medical science, as far as I am acquainted with it,” he said, “ can do nothing for Lord Thurso. If there was a man outside in the street there with a barrel-organ and a monkey, who said that he could cure the opium-habit, I should welcome him in. I don’t believe in Christian Science

for cases of compound fracture or for cases of complete atrophy of the will. But it is my duty to let anything be tried. And now, since I have admitted that, I wish to consult you. You are one doctor in consultation with me, another doctor, over your poor brother's case."

Maud gave a sudden little startled gasp.

"But I can't—" she said. "I know nothing."

"Nor do I. At least I only know (and Mr. Triton, whom I had in consultation with me this morning, agrees with me) that it is mere waste of time for us to try to treat this case medically. There are certain things—cancer is one, the opium-habit is another, Addison's disease, though you mayn't know what that is, is a third, and there are many more—where doctors are perfectly useless. They have been trained also to say, 'This is incurable,' and that, added to their experience that they have never cured it, makes them, if they are honest, not take fees in order to go on visiting a patient whom they know they cannot restore to health. They may still, though their honesty is unimpeachable, then consider it their duty to use drugs or treatment that may prolong life a little. With that I have no particular sympathy. They may also, and with this I am in complete sympathy, palliate, and with all their skill, the sufferings of anyone whom they know must soon die."

The dear old sea-captain felt himself much moved. He was spending his valuable time, which might have been remuneratively occupied; but he somehow regarded that as an offering laid on the altar, a tribute to the glorious bravery of these two women.

“ I will always do that,” he said, “ and if we are to leave your brother to die, I will make his days painless to him. But the moment I begin to make his days painless, I aggravate his disease. You, Lady Maud, believe that he has a chance. I do not; but since all I can offer to you and him is so much less than what you offer, I, though a professional doctor, say, ‘ Do what you can, and God be with you!’ Now, to descend to practical details, what will you do? Where is this Mr. Cochran? But I suppose there are plenty of these healers.”

Maud strove for a moment to separate the two strands of her desires, the one of which was to see Thurso delivered from this drug-possession, the other to see and be with Walter Cochran again. But her answer was absolutely honest.

“ I have knowledge of only one of the Christian Science practitioners whom I really believe in,” she said, “ and he is Mr. Cochran. I saw him cure, with my eyes I saw him restore to life, a dying man. Of the others—there is Lady Yardly——”

Sir James laughed suddenly.

“ Why that? ” she asked.

“ She came to me a few months ago for a tonic,” he said. “ She had been suffering from general catarrh for some weeks.”

Maud laughed too.

“ Oh, Alice! ” she said to herself.

“ Mr. Cochran has not come to me, however,” said Sir James.

“ Well, I believe in him,” said Maud. “ At least—you see I am nearly a Christian Scientist myself. I believe that he can direct the power of God on to people. And that is the biggest thing possible, isn’t it? ”

Sir James nodded quietly.

“ It is the only thing possible,” he said, “ whether you have cancer, or consumption, or a toothache. That I entirely believe, and I believe that if you can get that direct power you have no need of us. And when we—the doctors, I mean—say we are powerless, get in the man with the barrel-organ. Oh, but compound fracture! ” he cried suddenly. “ What ridiculous nonsense! ”

He was silent for a moment after this sudden professional burst of indignation.

“ But this Mr. Cochran,” he said. “ Who and where is he? ”

“ He is in America,” said Maud. “ I heard

from him two days ago. He is in New York."

The doctor was silent a moment. "I have read some of their literature," he said, "and heard about some of their reputed cures, and if you choose—if *you choose*, mind—you can send a telegram to this Mr. Cochran acquainting him with the state of affairs. You see, I don't think Mr. Cochran can hurt Lord Thurso, and I feel sure that we, the doctors, can't benefit him."

"Am I to get Mr. Cochran to come here, then?" asked Maud.

"I think not. In the first place, it is a good deal to ask, and in the second, if only you or Lady Thurso could persuade him to go, I am quite convinced that a sea voyage, though of course it will not in any sense cure him, will benefit him. Now do you think it is in your power to persuade him to go? You needn't say anything about a Christian Science practitioner waiting for him at the end, there is no need to mention that, unless you think well."

Maud thought about this.

"Yes, I think I might be able to persuade him," she said, "because certainly he used to listen to me when he would listen to nobody else. Would you think it odd if I suggested that he and I went alone, without Lady Thurso, I mean?"

"I should have suggested it, if you had not," said the doctor.

“Of course, poor Thurso is mad, he is not himself,” said Maud. “But you know all this month he has been behaving as if he hated her.”

The doctor nodded.

“I know. She has told me. Now I should advise your putting this plan before your brother as soon as possible—to-morrow, perhaps, if he goes on as well as he has done to-day. And now I must be off. I shall be here, of course, to-morrow morning.”

Thurso, for a man who had just passed through so dangerous an attack, weakened also as he was by his opium indulgence, showed extraordinary recuperative power, and next day he asked of his own accord if Maud might come in and see him.

This Sir James at once allowed.

“She may certainly come,” he said. “I will tell her.”

He waited for a moment, but Thurso said nothing about his wife, and shortly after the doctor left him Maud came in.

“Now, it’s only a quarter of an hour, dear Thurso,” she said, “that I am allowed to stay. You frightened us out of our wits yesterday, you know, and to-day, why, you look ever so much better.”

Thurso did not at once reply to this; then he spoke quickly.

"I don't want to see Lily," he said. "I think the sight of her would send me off my head. It's she who has brought me to this. It was she who ruined my nerves by always rushing about and flying off in every direction."

"Ah, never mind that," said Maud. "The only thing that you must do now is to stay quiet and get well."

But Thurso interrupted her.

"I've behaved abominably to her, too," he said; "but she drove me to it. She despised me. I could see she despised me, and so I hit back."

"Thurso, you mustn't talk like that," commanded Maud. "But if you feel that you don't want to see Lily, I've got a plan to propose to you which we might do when you are better."

"Well?"

"Sir James told me yesterday that you would have to go somewhere to pick up again, and suggested the sea. Now you and I both like the sea, so why shouldn't we go off together, go to America or somewhere, just for the voyage. We could stay at Lily's house on Long Island for a week or two if you liked."

"Without Lily, do you mean?" asked he.

"Well, she loathes the sea."

His eye brightened.

"Yes, I'll come," he said, "if you promise Lily won't. I won't go with her, mind."

His voice had risen sharply over this, and he was silent afterwards, breathing rather quickly. Then he looked at Maud as she sat beside the bed, and something in her youth and beauty stirred some chord of memory in him, and his mind, which was quite clear, for all the deadly weakness of his body, went back to early days when he and Maud had been together so much, bound together in an intimacy and affection that seldom exists between brother and sister. She had always been such a good friend to him, such a capital comrade, and now, he felt, there must stand between them the horrors of these last months. For the moment he got outside himself and judged himself, and saw how hideous it had all been.

“I’ve made a pretty good mess of it all,” he said.

She laid her hand on his.

“Yes, dear Thurso, but the past is past,” she remarked; “and, thank God, it’s never too late.”

Then that moment passed. It had been as brief as a sudden ray of sun piercing through some un conjectured rent in blinding storm-clouds.

“But it’s Lily’s fault,” he said.

But the ray had been there; his soul, though sick to death, still lived. And that was the only bit of consolation that Maud could carry away with her.

CHAPTER VIII

THURSO'S recovery, though he had no relapse and no hint even of a second attack, had been rather slow, and it was three weeks from the time of his collapse when he and Maud were sitting together on the deck of the "Celtic," watching the shores of Ireland fade into gray mist as they sank on the horizon. They had embarked the day before at Liverpool, and though they had been at sea only twenty-four hours, already some semblance of color was returning to his face. But if Maud had met him now for the first time in a year, she felt that she would scarcely have known him. Those months of steady indulgence in the drug had made his face look strangely wan and old; the cheeks had fallen in, crows' feet had been planted at the outer corners of his eyes, and the lids were baggy and pendulous. But it was his mouth that had changed most; all power and determination had gone from it, it drooped weakly and feebly at its corners, and the lower lip hung loose—it was the mouth of a sensual and self-indulgent man. His hair, too, had grown very thin, and streaks of gray had appeared in it. Then, on the top of this rapid physical degenera-

tion, had come his very severe attack of heart failure; illness as well as deterioration had left its mark on his face.

Sometimes, when during these last weeks she had looked at him, she had felt her courage and hope for the future almost vanish. Nor was it only his body which had so aged and fallen away, his soul was sick to death. He had fits of black despair and depression, when he could bear to see nobody, not even her, and would lock himself up in his room, giving orders that his meals were to be left outside, and that under no circumstances was he to be disturbed. Then when he began to emerge from these, remorse for the wreck he had made sometimes overtook him, and he would ask her to sit with him, while he unloaded himself of tons of despair. Half a dozen times he had said that he would not go to America at all; what could a week or two of sea-air do for a man in his case? He felt that death was near; he would die as comfortably as might be in his own house. But then the pendulum would swing further; his depression would be succeeded by bitterness against Lily, and the settled conviction that it was she who was morally responsible for his downfall. It was that indeed which was the immediate cause of his having left England; the day before they were to sail he had had a black day of despair, and had altogether refused

to go. But when the morning came that had passed, and his one desire was to get away from her, to leave her neighborhood altogether. She was in England, therefore he would go anywhere else. And his last words to her had been, "You are responsible for all this!"

It was all black enough, and there had been at present only one ray of comfort. He had not taken laudanum again, nor, as far as could be ascertained, had he tried to get any. But Sir James did not let Maud build much upon that.

"He is still frightfully weak," he had said; "it is when his strength begins to come back that he will begin to crave for it. At present he is not strong enough to want anything."

He had not yet been told what the ulterior object in his going to America was, for it was thought that if he knew that he would probably refuse to go altogether. Sir James had had a talk with Maud on this subject shortly before they left.

"There is a psychological moment for telling him that, my dear lady," he said, "which has not yet arrived. At present, your brother shows no desire for anything, neither for the drug, nor for any return to health. He does not even, I think, want to die. But as he begins to get back his strength he will begin to desire again—he will

want the drug; he will want to get well also. Then tell him."

There was a bright winter's sun shining where they sat, and their place was shielded from the wind of their motion by the deck smoking-room. Two days ago there had been a big wind, and there was still a considerable swell. But the huge ship took little account of that, and glided with little motion across this wonderful gray sea, that broke into dazzling white against her burrowing bows. Something of the pale crystalline blue above was reflected in the great joyous hills and valleys of water that streamed hissing by them, and the grayness of the winter Atlantic was shot with delicate azure, as if, though it was barely yet midwinter, there was some promise of spring in the air, and the return to the summer coloring of green and blue. Above their heads the wind thrummed and whistled in the rigging of the masts, and the clean, unbreathed odor of the sea was salt and bracing. In spite of the sun, however, it was chilly to the unprotected, and both Thurso and his sister wore thick fur coats, and were covered in rugs. They had sat some little time in silence, and then Thurso turned to her.

"I feel better," he said, "and I haven't felt better for so long!"

"Ah, you are much better," she said. "You have been mending every day."

“ But there is a difference between being better and feeling better,” he said, “ and the second means more to the man who is ill. Now, I suppose we shall have to talk things out sometime, so why not now? I do feel better; I feel as if I could wish to be well again.”

This then was the moment of which Sir James had spoken to Maud, when it would be the time to tell Thurso of the real purpose of their coming to America, and he soon gave her the opportunity.

“ But I dare say I am beginning to wish that too late,” he said. “ How bad have I been exactly? How bad am I? ”

“ Do you mean your heart attack? ” she asked.

“ No, the other thing. I may tell you that for weeks before my attack I felt perfectly incapable of resistance. I could no more resist than I could resist breathing.”

“ You were as bad as you could be,” said she. “ Your heart-attack in a way saved your life. It prevented you wanting the stuff for a time.”

“ But does Sir James really think that a week or two at sea will cure that? ”

“ No; but he thinks it will do you good.”

Thurso threw back his head, and drew in a long breath of the cold, pure air. And at the same moment he suddenly felt his mouth water at a thought that had come into his head. He was beginning to want again.

“ But he has no idea that it will cure me? ” he said, with a certain suspicious persistence.

Then Maud knew that her time had come.

“ No, he never thought it would cure you, and he doesn’t profess to be able to cure you himself. But, Thurso, there is another chance, perhaps. He sanctioned our trying it.”

“ What chance? Another doctor in America? I’ll go to any doctor or any quack you please.”

“ It isn’t a quack I want you to go to. I want you to see if a Christian Science practitioner can’t do anything for you.”

Thurso was silent a moment.

“ It has been a plot, then? ” he asked in that dreadful cold tone in which he spoke of his wife.

“ Yes, dear, but don’t speak like that,” said Maud. “ You speak as if it were a plot against you, instead of a plot for you. I didn’t tell you, because I was afraid you might refuse to come. I have been responsible for it all.”

The mood which she knew and dreaded was gaining on him—his face was blanching with hate and suspicion.

“ You assure me Lily didn’t have a hand in it,” he said, “ so that she might be left alone with Villars? ”

Maud made a gesture of despair.

“ Oh, you are mad,” she said. “ It isn’t you who speak when you say dreadful false things

like that, but it's that demon which possesses you, Thurso, that horrible drug. It has poisoned your body, and it is poisoning your soul."

Then with that bewildering rapidity that she knew and dreaded, his mood changed again. But the change, though he was in the darkness of abysmal despair, was for the better; anything was better than that hate and suspicion.

"Yes, I am poisoned; I am altogether poisoned," he said quietly.

Maud turned an imploring face to him.

"No, dear, you are not altogether poisoned," she said, "and the fact of your saying that shows that there is some little sound piece left. If you were altogether poisoned you wouldn't know it; there would be nothing to tell you what was poisoned and what was wholesome still. And you feel regret still. I saw it in your eyes just now, and, though it cuts me to the heart, I wouldn't have it there. It is just your regret, your desire to do better, which is the only soil out of which your salvation can come."

Her voice died on the last words. Then she spoke again.

"Oh, Thurso, if you only knew how I care!" she said.

For that moment he was touched. He looked at her kindly.

"Poor Maud!" he said.

“ No, never mind that,” she answered. “ Get well, get the poison out of your soul and body, for your own sake.”

Once again the genial thrill of convalescence, “ I’m feeling better,” came over him, and once again his thought framed a further desire. But he detached himself from that, and brought himself back to her again.

“ And do you really believe that I *can* be cured? ” he said. “ Is an appalling young woman to come and sit by me and sing verses of hymns? I read something of the sort in a book I found at home the other day. It was yours, I suppose.”

She almost laughed.

“ No, dear, there are going to be no appalling young women about. You know the practitioner we are going to. And you like him.”

Thurso frowned; he seemed to be able to remember nothing; memory was there still, but it was veiled, he could not reach it.

“ That—that fellow in Scotland? ” he asked.

Then for a moment memory came back, with a flash, vivid but brief.

“ I met him in the street up there one day,” he said, “ and he made me feel better. I had an awful headache. I say, that is something gained, isn’t it? I never have headaches now. What was his name, by the way? ”

“ Mr. Cochran,” said the girl.

“ Yes, of course, I remember. So he is going to sing hymns to me, is he? ”

But Maud did not smile now. Thurso was himself again in a way that he had not been for weeks. There might only be a minute or two of this; any moment might see him back again in despair and hatred. She wanted to make the most of it; the creeper—his will—was in her hand for a second; she might make some attempt at training it up again.

“ Oh, Thurso, pull yourself together,” she said; “ just make an effort for a moment to realize where you stand. Sir James says he is helpless; he says you have no will left which he can attempt to strengthen. I don’t believe that. I believe it is there still; and you are going to get God, not any mortal physician, to lay His hand on you. Try to believe, if only for a moment, that all power is His, and that he is all Love, all health, all life. That evil, and illness, and everything of that kind cannot exist in His presence. Let yourself be brought to it; do not hang back. You can help or hinder your cure. And, so I believe, we have been hindering it, by trusting to the power of man to cure you. That is all done with. You are coming to God now.”

For one moment, as she spoke, he sat straight up in his chair, looking suddenly awake, revived. But with that revivification came more

strongly than before the revivification of desire of another kind. All day a certain strength and vitality had been returning to him, born of austere sea-winds and Atlantic breezes, but, as must always happen, until the will is set and centred on the higher and immortal mind, and does not, as if through some sieve, strain off and reject all that is mortal and corruptible, this returning tide of vitality made more vital and insistent that on which his habit of mind, his degraded desire, had dwelt all these months. And this time it took more definite shape. He knew that in his private despatch-box, of which he alone had the key, there was a bottle of dark blue glass. He had put it there on the morning of their departure, not actively wanting it in any way, but from habit, as one packs hair-brushes and nail-scissors from habit, knowing one will want them, though not now. But now he began to want it; and though he wanted also to get well, to break this infernal chain that was wound so closely about him, yet that which had been the only real desire of his life for all these months pounced tiger-like on the fresh morsel of strength that had been thrown within reach. The other higher side of him, feebler and indeed almost atrophied, had no chance to reach that morsel before the other. Cunning began to return, too; and already there flashed through his brain the design of when he

should be able with safety to satisfy this growing desire. But even as he thought of it, the desire itself swelled mushroom-like. It must be soon, it must be now. Just a taste, a quarter dose, to satisfy himself that there was still something worth living for. That warm thrill and vibration spreading from the head down through his neck, and invading every limb with its harmonies! Or should he tantalize himself, let himself get thirstier for it, before indulging in it? The more he wanted it, the more ecstatic was the quenching of that infernal thirst. He wanted it, but it was better to want it more. Even the want of it was pleasurable, when he knew that he could satisfy that want when he chose. He felt sure, too, that in moderation it could do him no harm. One had to heal one's self by degrees of a habit of this kind. And then he remembered when he had last said that to himself, the day before that on which Lily and Maud had thrown his bottle away. That had been an unwise move of theirs; he had fully intended to break himself gradually of the habit, but what they had done had brought on a hideous headache—the last, by the way, that he had had. Of course, he had to take the drug to relieve that. Otherwise he would not have taken it that day.

But now he had been without it for three weeks. That was an immense gain. But he wanted it now. Yes, now, there must be no waiting for his

craving to get stronger. That instinctive swallowing movement of his throat and tongue had begun, and that was always the signal he waited for. But he must still be cunning, he must prevent the possibility of suspicion conveying itself to Maud. That, however, was not difficult. It was as easy as lying; just as easy, in fact; there was no difference whatever between them. And he looked at her, at her big violet eyes just moist with tears, at her mouth just trembling a little with the feeling that inspired her words, and spoke without hesitation or bungling.

“ Yes, I believe that,” he said. “ I am going to God direct, as you say. I am not a Christian Scientist, but I do believe in His omnipotent power for good, so that nothing evil can exist in His presence. I should probably, as you thought, have refused to leave England if I had known why I was being brought here. But I thank you for bringing me.”

He paused a moment, wondering as a bystander who knew his heart might wonder at the profanity and wickedness of what he was saying, since all the time he was merely disarming her possible suspicions in order to be able to go to his cabin and be alone to unlock the despatch-box. He realized, too, that it would require a greater potency than a quarter dose to enable him to forget what he had just said, and slide blissfully off into that

state of consciousness which alone was worthy of the name of life. Half a dose surely would not hurt him; half a dose, that is to say, of the bigger doses which he had prescribed for himself. There was, too, a little more to be said yet. Incomplete lying was ever a tactical error. And his brain, flaming with desire, should make his next words absolutely convincing to his sister.

“ Sir James is a very clever doctor, no doubt,” he said, “ but he certainly made a mistake when he thought my will-power was dead, or something to that effect. I am glad he said it, and I am glad you told me, because that sort of opinion acts as a tonic. I will show him if it is dead. And did he really suppose I should consent to go to sea for a week without opium, if I did not mean to be cured in spite of him? ”

The desire was inflaming his brain more and more every moment, making it supernaturally cunning. He detected a possible error in those last words; he had protested a little too much. But that again was easily rectified.

“ I shouldn’t have said ‘ in spite of him,’ ” he said, “ because that makes it appear as if I thought that, having given me up, he didn’t wish me to get well. But, my goodness, how his prescription of sea-air is acting already. I was a log when I started; and now, Maud, am not I different? And about your fear that I shouldn’t

have come if I had known what our ultimate goal is, I am more than reconciled to it. I am impatient to get there. So we have finished our talk, have we not? I have said all I wish to say. My recovery, if I am to recover, is left in other hands, the best, the only ones. I can only say that with all the power of will that is in me, I elect to leave myself there. And if that is not to be, you may know that, though too late, I was willing."

Again he wondered at his wickedness, but did not regret it. It was so vastly more important than anything else to be able to get to his cabin without Maud following him, or being suspicious in any way. He could evoke his visions almost at will, and now he wanted to see the sky, as he had seen it up in Caithness, covered with blue acanthus leaves, with the star's dewdrops upon them, and the big sun a golden centre of a blue flower. Nor did Maud's words shake his desire, solemn though they were. They just went by him like a breeze past a well-built house.

"Oh, thank God, Thurso, thank God!" she said. "And I have said all, too. You will get well. I know it, since you feel like that. And now let us dismiss altogether what is past. It wasn't you who did all this, it was just evil possession. But that is driven out now; your words have told me that."

Bells for meals were very frequent on this ship, and Maud, as a matter of fact, was thoroughly well pleased with their frequency, for she had at sea that huge sense of bodily health that requires much to eat and many hours to sleep. The desire for sleep was shared by Thurso, and when just as she finished speaking the bell for tea tinkled up and down the deck, she went down to the saloon, and he to his cabin with the expressed intention not to appear till dinner-time, nor indeed then if he felt disinclined to move. This desire for sleep, Sir James had said, was one that should be gratified to the full, and when they parted in the vestibule that led on the one side to the cabins and on the other to the saloon, it was a possible good-night that Maud wished him. His valet would bring his dinner to his cabin in case he did not appear.

Till that afternoon, when at last Thurso showed that his will was not dead yet, that his face was set forward, that something of spring and the power of rebound was in him yet, Maud had not known how near despair she had been, or how forlorn did she in her inmost self feel that this hope was for which she was bringing him over sea. Slender and dim as it had been, she had still clung to it, and now how strong and firm it suddenly became, when she knew that Thurso re-

sponded to it too, and was willing, eager indeed, to put himself into the hands of Infinite Love to work for him the miracle which the finite skill of mortal treatment despaired of accomplishing. In that great upspringing of hope and joy which had come to her that afternoon the confined walls of the dining-saloon could not hold her long; her instinct was to be up again on deck between the huge sea and the huge sky, so as to let her soul go forth without the distraction of near objects and the proximity of other human beings into the presence of Divine Love. All this autumn she had been realizing slowly and dimly (for when evil and ruin were so close about her, it was hard not to believe in the reality of them) that only one power—that of God—had any true existence, that all else was false. But now that realization was being poured into her in floods, the dawn was growing dazzlingly bright, for already the miracle had begun, already hope had begun to spring from what doctors had declared was soil utterly barren, incapable of bearing fruit.

The upper deck was quite empty when she came up again, the sun had already set, and in the darkening skies the stars had begun to come forth, and she walked forward to the bows of the ship in order to be quite alone. The very rush of air round her, as the boat hissed forward into the west, where light still lingered, seemed to her

extraordinarily typical of what was happening spiritually to her. All around her lay the tossed darkness and billows of the unquiet sea, but just as this mighty ship went smoothly and evenly through them, so through the waves and fretful foam of human trouble her soul went straight towards the brightness in the west. She had doubted before, she had often and often striven to realize what she in her inmost soul believed; but her unbelief still needed help. But now help was brought to it.

“ Yes, it is so; it must be so,” she said to herself. “ For nothing can exist by the side of the Infinite; all else must vanish.”

She walked back along the decks that were beginning to shimmer with dew, unconscious of all else in the wonder and glory of the truth that was falling in golden rain round her. And below her feet, a few yards only away, Thurso was lying in his berth, not asleep, but very vividly awake, in his own hell-paradise. He looked no longer on the bare white walls of his cabin, for blue acanthus leaves covered it, and the stars shone like dewdrops on them, and in the centre the sun was the golden heart of an azure flower. It had required a full dose, and no quarter or half measure, to bring him there, but he was there now. One thing only troubled him a little, and that not much, it was only like an echo, not an

authentic voice, and that was the memory of the words with which he had so comforted his sister. He could not remember exactly what they were, but they were very solemn. Well, that could not be helped now, but he wished he could get rid of the feeling they gave him. He could not abandon himself absolutely and utterly to the bliss of his vision. They came between him and it like a little film of gray.

As a rule, he slept well, especially after an opium debauch. But to-night, when, soon after he had eaten a little dinner which his valet brought him, he undressed and went to bed, he felt not exactly staring wide-awake, but dully, stupidly awake. It was now about eleven, and since the effects of the opium usually wore off after six or seven hours, leaving him, as the vividness of sensation begun to fade, very sleepy and languid, he could not account for his inability to sleep. Then his disquiet began to take more definite form. He felt as if somebody, Maud, was in his cabin, looking at him with that bright face of thankfulness which she had turned on him at the end of their interview on the deck. This conviction became so vivid that he spoke to her, calling her by name. She did not answer, and he turned on his light to convince himself that she was not there.

So he put it out and lay down again, but no sooner had he closed his eyes and tried to compose himself to sleep when the same feeling of her presence, more definite than ever, again visited him. She was quite close to him, and he knew as well as if she put it into words what filled her brain. It was all about him. She was saying to him again and again, "You are feeling better; God is making you better, dear Thurso. You are coming straight to Him, and no sin or evil or sickness can exist in His Presence." And together with this, the memory of his words to her, which had so comforted her, came back with added vividness. He remembered what he had said now; he had used the strongest and most solemn words he could, so that he could go at once to his cabin and—do what he had done.

This lying here grew intolerable, he was getting more acutely awake every moment, and as he grew more awake the more he was aware of Maud's presence. Was it perhaps some warning, did it mean that she was in danger of any kind, and that, as at the hour of death, her soul sought his so vehemently that it produced the hallucination of her presence? The next moment he had jumped out of his berth and put on a few hasty clothes, in order to go to her cabin and see if she was all right. Yet at the door he hesitated. He could not face her; he would be-

tray himself; his eyes and mouth would betray him, and she would see what he had been doing. But anxiety for her overmastered him, and he went and tapped at her door.

She answered at once and he went in. She was still fully dressed, and seated on a chair by the bed, her face radiant in happiness.

“Not in bed yet?” he said.

“No, I was too happy to go to bed.”

Then as she looked at him she paused.

“What is the matter, Thurso? What have you come to me for?”

He could not meet her eye, but looked away.

“I couldn’t sleep,” he said. “I kept thinking you were in the room. I came to see if you were all right.”

She gave a long sigh.

“You have been taking laudanum again,” she said. “Anyhow, you came to tell me that.”

He looked back fiercely at her.

“I haven’t,” he said. “What do you mean? I——”

And then his voice failed him; his lips stuttered over a few words more, but no sound came. She entirely disregarded his denial; she did not seem even to have heard it.

“I was in your cabin,” she said. “All my soul was there. Oh, Thurso, don’t despair.”

Then something seemed to break within him.

He could not go on telling lies to her; for the moment, perhaps because he was so tired, he could not call up the energy to protest. It was simpler, too, to tell her.

“ Yes, it is hopeless,” he said; “ it is no good trying. As soon as my strength came back to me a little to-day the craving came back. I brought a bottle of the stuff with me. Oh, yes, I told you I hadn’t. I lied. All the time I only wanted one thing, to get away to my cabin. I didn’t care what I said. Now I suppose you will want me to give you up the rest of it. Well, I can’t. Now that I have taken it again, I find I don’t want anything but that. It’s no use you’re thinking I can get better, or get over it. I have given myself up. You had better do so, too.”

For one moment Maud felt that he spoke the truth—he was beyond power of recall. But the next her whole soul and strength was up in arms fighting that thought, passionately reversing it. There was nothing in the world so true as Infinite Love; she had known that this afternoon, and already she was letting error obscure it. Vehemently, furiously she fought it, and then suddenly she wondered what she had been fighting. For there was nothing there—her blows were rained upon emptiness. It was as if she had dreamed she was fighting. For there was nothing to fight. And she spoke to Thurso as she

might have spoken to a child who was afraid of the dark.

“ You silly boy! ” she said. “ What *can* you mean by such nonsense? How can I give you up? How can I give up my love for you? That is the one thing nobody can give up. And you are frightened, you know. How can you be frightened, when there is nothing in the world to frighten you? You said this afternoon things that made me unutterably happy, and now you come and say they were lies, that you didn’t mean them. I am sorry you didn’t mean them; but they weren’t lies. Perhaps you spoke the truth by accident.”

That sombre smouldering of despair in his eyes faded.

“ Do you mean you can possibly trust me now? ” he said.

Then he added quickly:

“ But I can’t give up the bottle to you.”

Maud almost laughed.

“ Well, if you can’t, you can’t,” she said. “ And now I’m going to see you back to your cabin, and you are going to bed. You have had a dreadful evening, dear, over these nightmare errors. I am so sorry; oh, Thurso, I am so sorry! And if you feel me in the room again, you mustn’t be frightened, or think there is anything wrong.”

He said nothing to this, and they went down the narrow passage to his cabin in silence.

“And you’ve had dinner?” she asked. “You won’t be hungry before morning? It’s only just one, you know. I could get you something.”

“No, nothing, thanks,” he said. Then his eye fell on the despatch-box, and he stood looking at it a moment. Then he took a bunch of keys from his pocket, detached one, and flung it on the ground.

“That’s the key,” he said, “and it is inside the despatch-box. You may take it if you like.”

That radiance in the girl’s face that had left her only for a moment glowed and shone with a double light. But she made no movement to pick up the key.

“Dear Thurso, where *are* your manners?” she said. “That really is not the proper way to give me a key.”

“I won’t give it you in any other,” said he.

She longed to pick it up herself; she could hardly restrain herself from doing so; but she longed also that, strengthened by this first effort, he should make another, give her the key voluntarily.

“Then I’m afraid it must stop where it is,” she said. “Good-night!”

He turned with a frown to her.

“Oh, Maud, you fool!” he said. “Why don’t

you take it while I can just manage to give it you? ”

“ Because you must give it me like a gentleman, of course,” she said.

Ah, how pleasant and human were the dealings of Love! Half an hour ago tragedy, sordid, bitter and heart-breaking, had been hers, and now not only was comedy here, but sheer farce, mirthful, productive of silly, childish laughter. Thurso laughed, too, as he bent down and picked up the key.

“ You are an obstinate woman,” he said.

“ I know. Thank you, darling! ”

She undid the despatch-box.

“ Oh, Thurso, what a big bottle! ” she said.

But the sight of it kindled and enflamed him again.

“ Ah, give it me back,” he said; “ I can’t let you have it. I told you I couldn’t.”

Maud was nearest the door, and she simply ran out of the cabin with the bottle. She made not half a dozen steps of the stairs that led to the deck, and before half a minute was past a large bottle of laudanum was sinking in a lonely and desolate manner through the abysmal floods of the Atlantic Ocean.

“ That’s an end to the harm you’ll do,” she said to herself, without a grain of pity.

But in spite of this brilliant victory, she knew well that there must be many uphill battles to fight before recovery could be in sight—Walter Cochran had told her that in a letter she had received from him just before she left England. He had answered at once to her cable by another, merely saying that “he would cure Thurso,” and had written fully afterwards. The letter ended thus: “I know that you believe in the infinite and omnipotent Mind, which is the sole and only cause of all the world, and though you are not a member of our church at present, yet since you believe the Gospel on which every cure that Christian Science has ever made is based, begin treating him at once yourself. Combat in your mind every sign of error you see in him, and never be discouraged. Of course, good must triumph, but when error is so firmly rooted in a man it wants some pulling up; it won’t come away as a mere shallow-rooted weed will. You will have to face apparent failure again and again, but remember that you are always on the winning side.”

The days that followed amply illustrated this, and there were many hours when she almost despaired. Every evil, erring mood that had made up his record for the last six months was crammed into the days of that voyage. Sometimes his will would flicker in a little dim flame, so that she knew it was not yet quenched; but the flame was

feeble, and the blacknesses that surrounded it were dense. One day he went to the ship's doctor, bringing with him the prescription, which he knew by heart, and had himself written out and signed with Sir James Sanderson's name, asking him to have it made up. The doctor read it.

"Certainly, Lord Thurso," he said. "I will have it sent to your cabin. It is rather strong, you know. You will be careful how you use it. It is to relieve pain, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suffer from very bad neuralgic headaches," said Thurso. "Thank you very much."

He left the surgery, his heart beating with exhilarated anticipation, when suddenly the doctor, who was looking at the prescription again, gave a little whistle, and then called him. Thurso had hardly left the room, and came back at once.

"Lord Thurso, this is rather odd," he said. "But this prescription is written on the ship's paper. Is Sir James on board?"

Thurso made a furious gesture of impatience.

"Oh, for God's sake, give it me!" he said. "I shall go mad without it. It was Sir James's prescription. I—I copied it."

The doctor shook his head, for he saw plainly enough now what he was dealing with.

"It is quite impossible," he said. "I am very

sorry. Of course, this matter shall go no further."

Thurso merely walked away; there was nothing more to be said, and then suddenly the little flicker of will and of outraged self-respect began to shoot up again, and he saw how mean it all was. He, Thurso, had not only forged this, but he had been caught at it; it had happened before, too. This powerlessness of his against his desire was intolerable; his pride rebelled against the hideous strength of his weakness.

He leaned against the bulwarks of the ship in despair at himself, yet since for the moment he was ashamed, since he wished he was not such a despicable fellow, the despair was not complete. But perhaps it would be better all round if he ceased to struggle or to be at all. One moment of bravery, one leap into those huge gray monsters of waves that were making even this leviathan of the seas sway and rock, and it would all be over. But he had not, he knew, even the courage for that. No moral quality seemed to be left him; they had all been transformed into this hideous desire, as a cancer turns the wholesome blood and living tissues into its own putrefying growth. And what if that doctor told some one? He had said that it should go no further, but who could resist so savory a bit of scandal? Lord Thurso forging Sir James San-

derson's name in order to get laudanum, to which he was a slave! That would make a fine head-line, if tastefully arranged for some New York paper.

Or again he would rail at Maud, laying tongue to any bitter falsehood that he could invent, or he would sit in mere idle despair, which she found harder to endure, without suffering herself to despair also, than anything else. It was all error, it was the unreal, the mortal, the non-existent part of him that suffered; but it was very hard to cling to the truth of that, as to the Rock of Ages, and not let the sea of error wash her away.

But after this not very brilliant attempt to get laudanum from the ship's doctor, Thurso made no further effort in that direction, and now and then there were little rifts in that storm of error that was so dark and gray above him. He told Maud, for instance, about the forged prescription, a thing which was hard for him to do, and more than once, also, when for an hour perhaps he had sat inventing bitter things in order to wound her, he would stop suddenly.

"Maud, I'm an utter brute," he would say. "But try to cling to your belief that it is not I."

Then Maud would look at him with lip that quivered, and eyes that were brimming with unshed tears.

"Oh, Thurso, I know that," she said. "And

if I forget it now and then, and feel wounded, thinking that it is you who have been saying those things, I—I know it is not so really.”

Throughout the voyage, too, his mere bodily health and strength was steadily though slowly on the mend. He put on a little flesh; there was a little more brightness of eye and clearness of skin than when he left England, and this seemed to her a visible sign of the truth of what she believed. With all her heart, too, she set herself to reverse and to forget the warning that Sir James had given her—that as his strength began to return, so the strength of his craving would return. On the first day or two of the voyage, it is true, that had seemed to be the case, and Thurso had felt it to be so himself, but she had not then set herself, as she did now, hour after hour, to fight and vanquish any such tendency in him. With heart lifted high with hope and faith, she denied that. She affirmed that his health, being a good thing, it could not let itself be a slave to an evil thing, for thus evil would be stronger than good—a thing unthinkable. No, the strength that was coming back to him, slowly indeed, meant so many efforts, so many repulses of that mortal and earthly habit that had become so intimate a guest of his soul. That hideous, dwarfish shape which he had admitted, with its blar eyes, its trembling hands, clothed in the shroud and cere-

ments of sensuality, was being pushed and dragged out again. It was hard work, none knew that better than she, but failure was impossible, and well she knew that. When at last they got it to the door of his soul, and got that door open so that the sunshine of infinite Love poured in, with what cry of joyful amazement would he see that that dreadful figure that seemed now so real was nothing, that it had no real existence. It was cheating them all the time, she knew; it was only in the twilight of his soul that what was only a shadow seemed to be real.

Now and then, too, the real Thurso, the kindly, courteous gentleman who had been to her so well-loved a brother, came back, and he and Maud would talk about old days before ever this shadow blackened his path.

And they would live over again in that light of memory, which often lends a vividness to that which is remembered which it did not have in life, some windy, notable day on the moors when Thurso shot three stags, or some memorable morning by the river when Maud killed six salmon before lunch.

“ Oh, Thurso, and I should have killed the seventh, do you remember, but I let the line get round that rock in the roaring pool and he broke me.”

“By gosh, I remember,” he said. “You nearly cried. Lord, what good days they were! I was awfully happy all that summer. I had hideous neuralgia, I remember, and it rather spoiled my pleasure, but it didn’t spoil my happiness. How do you explain that?”

“Why, nothing can spoil one’s happiness,” she said, answering his question without thought. “All happiness——”

But he got up suddenly.

“I get the heart-ache to think of it all,” he said.

She rose too.

“Ah, Thurso, it will come back,” she said.

He looked at her with a sudden face of gloom.

“And you?” he asked. “And Lily? How can either of you forget? It is absurd to say that things can be the same. Not even God can put the clock back, and say it is yesterday.”

“No, dear,” she said, “but the sun rises again, and to-day becomes to-morrow. ‘Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.’”

The bitter mood was pouring in on him again.

“Ah, a phrase!” he said.

“Yes, but a true one,” she answered.

But these hours were short and rare, and it was seldom that he was even able to think regret-

fully of the past. For the most part he was suspicious and bitter, or silent, full only of the one deadly desire. All day it was in his mind, and at night he dreamed of it. But as the days that must elapse before they reached New York began to be reckoned by hours, his despair and dispiritedness were sensibly lessened. Maud noticed that, and sometimes he spoke hopefully of the new cure that was to be tried; yet as often as he did this his voice rang as false as a cracked bell, and she knew it was not this that he looked forward to, but to escaping from the prison of a ship, where his desire was denied him, on to the comparative freedom of dry land, where there were chemists, drug-stores. . . . Yet with his returning strength his craving no longer seemed to grow proportionately. There was some check on it, unanticipated by Sir James. He wanted the drug; she knew that, and his brain, she felt sure, was scheming to get it. But the madness and raving of desire had not appeared, and already they were steaming slowly up to the relentless city.

Thurso and she were standing on deck together as they drew near, on a morning of crystalline brightness. The land was white with snow, but the air was windless, and she felt that even the town, which has the credit of possessing not the worst climate in the world, had its beautiful days.

Higher and higher rose the huge, many-storied buildings, and from the pale blue of the winter sky they passed into the region of gray smoke that overhung the city. From the wide, tenantless space of the ocean they slid into more populous waters; stately liners were leaving for eastward ports, and in a moment from the desert of the high seas they passed into the crowded waterways, full of broad-decked ferry steamers, and the innumerable hooting of sirens. Already, before they touched the shore, each felt that stimulus of air and intense activity which New York exhales—the atmosphere of continuous, unremitting effort, that makes every other town in the world seem dronish and lazy.

The huge bulk of their ship moved up to its berth, towed in sideways, like some tired fish, by two or three tiny, bustling tugs. And on the landing dock Maud saw a figure she knew, tall and serene, with no great-coat on, for all the chilliness of the morning, and across the space of water that separated them her heart leaped lightly to him. She did not consciously think of herself; it was of Thurso she consciously thought when she saw there the man who had flicked across the ocean the message that “he would cure him,” but subconsciously, and not less eagerly, she leaped to him because he was he. Then she turned to Thurso.

“There is Mr. Cochran,” she said. “How kind of him to have come down to meet us!”

It was yet a long time before the ship was berthed and the landing-planks put out, and Maud had not known how his heart, too, had leaped on board when he had caught sight of them standing on deck. To him, too, the leap had been double—he longed to save the one from mental error, he longed to draw near to the other with that flame of human love which yet has been kindled at the fire which is divine.

Then they met, all three.

CHAPTER IX

WALTER COCHRAN had taken them straight across to their house on Long Island, near Port Washington, and had returned in the evening to his own flat in Fifth Avenue. As regards Thurso, the spiritual conflict of the Divine and Infinite over the mortal and finite had begun, and of the ultimate issue of that he had no doubts whatever. But there was another conflict no less hard before him, and as he sat now for a few minutes after eating his one dish of vegetables, which was his dinner, he brought all his force to bear on that. For to-morrow, at the joint request of Thurso and his sister, he was going down to their house to stay with them. That arrangement he could not refuse—since they were so kind as to ask him. It was simpler and better in every way, as regards the cure he knew he was going to effect, to do so. Thus, all day he would see and be with the girl whom he loved, with that intensity which made him the healer that he was. Yet, since, because he would be there simply as a healer, and since except as a healer he would never have been there, he knew that he must entirely swamp and drown the desire of his life. He

must say no word, make no sign. Even that was not enough, he feared. He must school himself to feel no longing, he must drown his love while he was there. For he was there *only* as one who could bring the power of God to bear on this man, who was obscured by error. That was the sole reason for his presence there. And as he sat here now, he wondered if he was strong enough to do what he knew he must do, or whether it was better to refuse to go to Long Island at all, but send somebody else. On the other hand, he had himself promised to cure Thurso; they had come from England on the strength of that promise. But would it not be better to break that than to lead himself into the temptation of using for his own ends the opportunity that had been given to him, and accepted by him, for the purpose of demonstrating the eternal truth, which was more real than any human love?

The cold outside was intense; it had come on to freeze sharply at sunset, but he got up and set his window open. The aid it gave him was adventitious only, but he found it easier to detach himself from the myriad distractions of mortal mind, if instead of the closed atmosphere of a room, the taintless air of out-of-doors came in upon him. Very possibly that was a mere claim of mortal mind, but it was better to yield to such a claim when it was clearly innocent, if it told

him that the working of the immortal was thereby made easier, than to waste energy in fighting such a claim. And then, as he had done before when he went out to the bedside of Sandy Mackenzie, he called his thoughts home. Thoughts of the day and the sea, and the sunshine and the windless frost came flocking back, and went to sleep. Other thoughts, a little more laggard of wing, had to obey, too; he had to forget the book he had been reading during his dinner, the swift hour of skating in the afternoon, the serious doubt whether he had the right to treat as his own the fortune that his father had left him. Then other thoughts, more laggard yet, had to go to roost (and if possible die as they were roosting)—his physical disgust for a man who had by sheer weakness and self-indulgence allowed himself to get into the state that his patient was in; that slack lip, that sallow face, the thinning and whitening hair, they were all the footprints of error that had been made a welcome and desired guest. He would scarcely have known the man again. But all this had to sleep—he had to regard him only in the light of Love, in the spirit of Him who healed the leper's sores. Slowly and with effort that was done, but there was still one winged thought abroad, harder to recall than any—Maud. She, too, had to be called home (and the irony of the phrase struck him), her beauty, her

incomparable charm, must now be all non-existent for him. Whatever power he had must not be spent elsewhere. She must cease—all thought of her must cease.

Then, like the driving-wheel of some engine just beginning to haul its ponderous weight out of the depot, the power of the Divine Mind began to move within him. Once and again the wheel spun round, not biting the rail, for the load was very heavy, but soon the driving power began to move him, the engine, and its dead and heavy weight of trucks. It was dark under the roof of the depot, but outside there was sunshine. The only real force in the world could manage it, but the engine had to strive and strain, and grip the rails. Sometimes it seemed as if the weight behind was immeasurable, sometimes it seemed as if the force that drove him was so vast that he must be broken with it. But he knew, that little atom of agonized yet rapturous consciousness, which was all that he could refer to as himself, knew that it, and its freight, were in control of the one thing that cannot possibly make a mistake. For that one thing is Love, in whose hands alone the whole world is safe and saved.

The fire had gone out when he got up from his chair some hours later, and the bitter frost had frozen the glass of water he had poured out.

But he broke the crust of ice on it and drank. And in two minutes he was undressed and asleep, having plunged into bed with a smile that had broadened into the sheer laughter of joy.

Thurso awoke next morning feeling, so he told himself, the stimulus and exhilaration of a new climate, and the bracing effect of a dry, sunny, frosty morning. After the narrow berth of his cabin, it had been a luxury to sleep in a proper bed again, and it was a luxury also to lie at ease in it now. How well he had slept, too! He had slept from about eleven the night before till half-past eight; slept dreamlessly, without those incessant wakings from agonized dreams of desire which had so obsessed him during this last week. No doubt this change from the sedentary life of the ship to the wider activities of the land accounted for that, and, anyhow, he felt the place and the air suited him. Yesterday had passed pleasantly, too; he, Maud and Cochran had been for a long sleigh-drive in the afternoon, and—there was no use in denying it—Cochran was a very attractive fellow. He had the tact, the experience, the manner of a man, and yet all these were somehow steeped in the exquisite effervescence and glow of youth. Never had Thurso seen the two so wonderfully combined—“youth’s en-

chantment " was his still, the eager vitality of a boy.

When they returned, he had had an hour's talk with him alone, and, at Cochran's request, he had told him the whole history of his slavery. And, somehow, that recital had been in no way difficult. He felt as if he was telling it all to one who understood him better than he understood himself; one who did not in the least condone or seek to find excuses for the miserable tale, but one to whom these hideous happenings appeared only in the light of a nightmare, as if Thurso had had a horrible dream and was just telling him a dream only.

And at the end Cochran had still been genial.

" Well, now, that is a good start," he said, " for I guess you haven't kept anything back. Sometimes people have a sort of false shame, and won't tell one what perhaps is the very worst of all. Well, how can one take it to Infinite Love to destroy and abolish if one doesn't know what it is? "

Thurso was possessed of great courtesy of manner.

" Quite so, that is only reasonable," he said. But to himself he thought how odd it was that so straightforward and simple a fellow should have such a crank. Not that he was not perfectly willing to let the crank do what he could for him

—he would have worn any amulet or charm if anyone seriously thought it could help him.

“ Well, now, before I go back to town for the night,” continued Cochran, “ I want to start right away with you on this. Remember, first of all, that all that you have been suffering from is unreal. It has no true existence. Try to get that into your mind—the more you can make yourself think that, the quicker your cure will be. A patient can help his human doctor by determining to get well, can’t he? Well, you can help me by trying to realize that you never have been really ill. There isn’t such a thing as real illness.”

“ Do you mean that not only are the effects of the drug unreal, but the cravings for it are unreal? One can only judge by one’s feelings; one’s feelings are the ultimate appeal, and I assure you I know of nothing nearly so real as that. If it wasn’t real I shouldn’t have come to America.”

“ Ah, that’s where you make a mistake,” said Cochran. “ Supposing we all entered into a conspiracy to play a practical joke on you—got you committed for murder and got you condemned to death, so that you really believed it. You would be terrified, and your terror would be the realest thing in the world to you, you would say. But it would be all founded on a lie. And your craving

is founded on a lie. Such a stupid, transparent lie, too! As if evil has any power compared with good."

Thurso thought this illustration rather well chosen, but he was a little over-done and a little impatient. Also the mention of his craving had stirred it into activity again. He began to wonder if there was any drug-shop near. . . . And that thought made him the more impatient.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I am not a Christian Scientist, and the method doesn't really interest me, since I do not believe in it."

Cochran laughed, boyishly, with great good-humor.

"Oh, we'll soon alter that," he said, "and I am telling you the treatment, just as an ordinary doctor tells his patient the treatment."

"I suppose I am pretty bad," said he.

"I should just think you were. Why, you are all wrapped up in error. Have you ever unwound a golf-ball? There's yards and yards of india-rubber, you think it's going on forever. But at the centre there is a core. And there's a core in you, too. But we've got to unwind the error first."

Thurso got up, he was feeling every moment more fidgety and impatient. He was beginning to want the drug most terribly, his craving was growing with unusual rapidity; yet while Coch-

ran was here he felt that his will to get well, his desire to free himself, was keen also. And that gave him an impulse of honesty.

“ I tell you this, too,” he said: “ I’m wanting the drug most awfully now. Ah, help me,” he added with a sudden wail of appeal, “ for I know what I shall do when you are gone.”

“ Yes, tell me that,” said Cochran.

“ Well, I shall go and see where Maud is, and if she is downstairs I shall tell her that I am going to sleep till dinner-time, so that I can get away by myself. She trusts me, I think, still, after all that has happened. Then I shall go to my room and forge—yes, forge—a prescription. Then I shall send to the stables, and tell a man and horse to go down to Port Washington and say that it must be made up for Lord Thurso. And I shall sit gnawing my nails till he comes back.”

Cochran nodded at him.

“ Well, you’re making an excellent start,” he said, “ because you are telling me all. But you know you are just as wrong about what you say you will do as you were about the reality of what you have done. You won’t do anything of the kind.”

“ Ah, surely this is suggestion, hypnotic treatment,” said Thurso.

Walter Cochran gave one little click of impatience; then that passed.

“ I’m almost getting fatigued with hearing people say that,” he said. “ It’s you who have been suggesting things to yourself and imagining them with remarkable vividness. You’ve got to reverse all that; you’ve got to say to yourself now, ‘ I will do none of those things.’ I want to get your will on the right side. So now plan another evening for yourself. Come, what would be pleasant? Don’t make a long evening of it; I want you to go to bed before eleven.”

“ Why? ” asked Thurso.

“ Because I shall be treating you by then,” said he, “ and I find it’s an excellent plan to treat people while their bodies are reposing or asleep. They themselves, of course, their souls, are never asleep, and I guess it’s because the body is lying quiet and not suggesting distractions.”

“ But Maud tried to treat me once on the steamer,” said Thurso, “ and the effect was that I couldn’t get to sleep at all. I thought she was in the room.”

Although he had said just now that the treatment did not interest him, he was talking with genuine interest. There was something so attractive about this big, strong young man, who looked so awfully well and sane, and seemed to diffuse sanity and health. Yet, on this one subject, how

fantastically his mind framed itself, and withal how simple and unfantastic he seemed to think it.

“ Why, that was real good of Lady Maud, wasn’t it? ” he said. “ And that feeling of yours that she was in the room was very likely to happen. I’ll tell you why—like everything else to do with science, it’s so simple. The practitioner ought quite to sink himself; he shouldn’t be conscious of himself at all. He mustn’t think that he is controlling the working of the power of Divine Love. But that unconsciousness of one’s self only comes with practice. At first, the healer finds that his personality obtrudes itself.”

Quite unconsciously Thurso began to be more interested—unconsciously, too, and for the first time, the craving for the drug, which had reached an acute point, began of its own accord to grow less keen. The very simplicity of the thing, if only he could believe it was true, struck him.

“ Then why can’t you heal me instantly? ” he asked. “ If error cannot exist in the presence of Divine Love, how is it that time is required for its destruction? ”

“ Ah, you must lose your belief in the reality of error before it can become completely unreal to you,” said he; “ and your belief, I expect, goes deep, doesn’t it? Get Lady Maud to read to you out of the book she is studying. That will really be better for you than writing prescriptions, won’t

it? But now I must go; though there's no such thing as time really, it is still possible to miss a train."

"Though there are no such things as trains?" asked Thurso.

"Yes, but the false claim of a train is very hard to uproot," said Cochran, laughing. "It's better to go in them, and save your energy for the destruction of other and worse claims."

Thurso lay back in his big chair after Cochran had gone, conscious that something else than laudanum had begun to interest him a little. He felt no tendency whatever or leaning towards Christian Science, but he wanted to find some weak spot in the theory, some fatal inconsistency, which must invalidate it altogether. There must be one, even in the little he had already heard about it. At this moment Maud entered.

"Maud, give me a Christian Science book," he said; "I'm going to prove it's all wrong."

Maud laughed.

"Do, dear. It is the duty of everybody to expose error and falsehood. Shall I read it to you?"

"Yes, do."

Then suddenly his craving began to return, growing instantaneously to a hideous acuteness. His mind was like some light vehicle, from which

the driver had been upset, galloped away with by the bolting, furious horses of habit. Never before had the stroke fallen upon him with such suddenness. "A fine first fruit of the value of Christian Science," he said to himself. Yet though the reaction made him almost dizzy, he retained his presence of mind and that cunning which seemed to have been developed in him since he took to the drug. He mastered his voice completely, he mastered also that automatic swallowing movement of the throat that always accompanied one of his attacks of desire.

"Or shall we read after dinner?" he said. "That sleigh-drive made me so sleepy. I think I should drop asleep at once if you began to read."

Maud looked at him one moment with infinite pity—that was instinctive, she could not help it. Then she laughed again.

"Oh, what an old bungler!" she said. "You want to go to your bedroom, don't you, and forge—yes, forge—that prescription you forged with such brilliant success on the steamer, and send it down to the village to get your nasty, beastly drug? Thurso, it's all very well to forge once or twice, but you really mustn't make a practice of it; it grows on one dreadfully, I am told."

He came towards her, white and shaking.

"That quack Cochran has been talking to you, has he?" he said.

“ Oh, yes. Why not? And he isn’t proved to be a quack yet, you know.”

He laid his hand on her arm.

“ Maud, just this once,” he said. “ Do let me have it this once! I have never wanted it so before.”

She took his hand.

“ Thurso, I promise you I will go and get it for you myself at twelve o’clock to-night, if you still crave for it,” she said. “ Hold on for six hours—not so much, five hours—and then you shall have a real good go at it. Only in the interval you must do your best—your best, mind—not to think about it. And you must go to bed at eleven. That’s not much to ask, is it? ”

His eye brightened.

“ Why, of course, I can wait,” he said, “ if you really promise me that. And—you won’t tell Cochran? ”

“ Oh, no, you probably will. Now, if you aren’t really sleepy—and you don’t look it—I’ll read to you. It will help to pass the time till twelve.”

It had required all Maud’s faith to get through with this, but she had understood and agreed with what Mr. Cochran had said before he left. He wanted Thurso to make an effort himself, and believed that at present he could hardly do so, unless he was bribed to. He had suggested this plan, in fact.

“ But if he wants it at twelve? ” she had asked.

“ Oh, but he won’t,” he had answered. “ He can’t.”

All this Thurso thought over as he lay in bed next morning, watching his valet put out his things. He had gone to bed, as he promised, at half-past ten, hugging himself with the thought that midnight was coming closer every minute. And then—he had simply fallen asleep, and when he woke the pale winter sunshine was flooding the room.

Yet mixed with the exhilaration of this cold, bracing air, the memory of the pleasant day yesterday, the sense of recuperation after his excellent night, there came the feeling, as he got up and dressed, turning it all over in his mind, that he had been tricked. He had no idea how the trick was done, or how it was that he could have gone to sleep when, if he had but kept awake so short a time, he would have enjoyed, and that with no sense of concealment or surreptitious dealing, the one sensation that turned life into paradise. Certainly it had been extremely neatly done; Cochran was a finished conjurer, for, as he had said, Thurso had had no sense of his presence or his influence. But the sense of having been tricked somehow piqued him.

While he was dressing he heard already the sound of sleigh-bells, and guessed that Cochran had come, and when he got downstairs he found him and Maud at breakfast.

Cochran nodded at him.

"Good-morning, Lord Thurso," he said. "Now, Lady Maud here will tell you that neither she nor I have spoken a word about you this morning. I know nothing of what happened here since I left last night. I told her, just before I left, to fetch your drink for you, if you wanted it, at twelve o'clock. Now you've come down, I should like to hear from you both what has happened."

"I went to Thurso's room at twelve," she said, "and knocked. There was no answer, so I went in. He was fast asleep. I tried to rouse him, as you told me to, I called him and touched him. But he didn't awake."

"And you, Lord Thurso?" asked Cochran.

"Oh, this is childish," he said. "Maud, do you swear that that is true?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you or Mr. Cochran must have hypnotized me or drugged me," he said.

"I know less about hypnotism," remarked Cochran, "than I do of the inhabitants of Mars. What do you think we drugged you with?"

"Well, how did you do it, then?" he asked.

“ I didn’t do it. I had no idea whether you were asleep or awake at midnight. I only knew that Divine Love was looking after you.”

Something rather like a sneer came into Thurso’s voice.

“ And how did you know that? ” he asked.

“ How could it have been otherwise? He has promised to do anything for us which we ask in faith. You’ve never seen such a beautiful morning as it is. Cold, though.”

Thurso was undeniably in a very bad humor by this time. He felt sure there had been some suggestive or hypnotic force used on him the night before, but when a man denies it, and simply attributes all that has happened to the working of Divine Love, you cannot contradict him. Maud, however, had read to him last night out of some Christian Science book, and he had flattered himself he had found a hundred inconsistencies in it. Cochran’s last words, too, were utterly inconsistent, simple as they sounded.

“ How can you say it is cold,” he asked, “ when your whole gospel is rooted on the unreality of such things, cold and heat and pain and so on? Or did I misunderstand what we read last night? I certainly gathered that neither cold nor heat had any real existence.”

“ No more it has,” said Cochran.

“ Then is it not—what was the phrase—‘ voic-

ing error ' to allude to the temperature of the morning? "

Cochran laughed, a great big laugh of enjoyment.

" Yes, but where's the harm of voicing error as long as the error doesn't do any harm? Supposing the cold made me feel uncomfortable, or gave me a chill, then I should deny its reality. But it's a waste of time, isn't it, to spend the whole day in denying the existence of chairs and tables and heat and cold when they don't hurt you? My time is taken up with denying things that do hurt."

" Though nothing hurts? "

" False belief does, and its consequences hurt."

" I was merely inquiring," said Thurso, rather acidly. His mind still dwelt on the trick, for so he called it, that had made him go to sleep last night.

" Now, Mr. Cochran has promised to give me instruction for half an hour, Thurso," Maud said, " and after that I vote we go out. There's a lake, he says, not far off. We might go and skate."

" And what is to happen to me? " he asked.

" Am I to have treatment or laudanum? "

Walter Cochran looked up at him suddenly.

" Which would you like best? " he asked.

Then, though the moment was, as measured

by time, an infinitesimal one, his soul had thrown itself at the feet of Infinite Love, reminding Him of His promise, calling Him to help.

The acidity and sneering criticism suddenly died out of Thurso's mind. His moods altered quickly enough; it may have been only that.

"You know I want to be cured," he said.

Cochran made a little sign to Maud, who left the room.

"Yes, I know you do," he said, "and you're going to be. But you can help or hinder. All breakfast-time you've been hindering, you know. You've been asking those questions which I like answering and love to be asked, not because you wanted to know, but because you wanted to catch me out. Why, of course, you can catch me out. I don't deny it for a moment, because I'm often and often bound by error and the claims of mortal mind. But how does it help you to do that? Now, what's the trouble? Is it just because Infinite Love came to your help last night and sent you to sleep, instead of letting you drink that poison-stuff? I guess it's that still. Well, to doubt that it was so is error on your part. How often before when you've been wanting the stuff badly, and knew that in an hour or two you would get it, have you dropped off to sleep instead? Why, never. And when did this happen first? Why, when I was treating you, bringing you into

the Presence of Divine Love, not suggesting things either to Him or you, but just leaving you there."

"Ah, but I don't understand," said Thurso. "If you've done that, is it all over? Am I cured?"

"No, because you've made a habit of error, and you have to make a habit of giving error up before you are cured. You'll have to put yourself in the hands of Love often and often before you get rid of this. At least I expect that, but one can't know how He will choose to heal you. Why, man, we have to be continually doing that, whether we've made a habit, like you, of some particular form of error, or whether we are but just normal beings. And Divine Love is longing to help us, but we must ask."

"But why, why? If God is Infinite Love, why does He allow error to bind us at all?" asked Thurso.

"There is no doubt that it is so," answered Cochran. "Why, He has said so: 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, believing.'"

"But you profess to heal people who don't believe," said he.

"I know. Why not? But a man who didn't believe couldn't heal."

Again Thurso had got unconsciously interested.

"You spoke of laudanum as poison-stuff just

now," he said. "But if God made everything, including poppies, how can it be poisonous?"

Cochran laughed.

"Well, we had better have Lady Maud back," he said. "It was about that very thing I was going to talk to her to-day. Now, if you care to listen to that, since you've asked the question, why, pray do. But if you are not interested in it, why, if you'll read the morning paper, or anything else, just for half an hour, we can then all start out skating or whatever else you like."

"But aren't you going to treat me?" asked Thurso.

"Oh, I was at it this morning for some time," he said. "I've paid you the morning visit, so to speak."

Then again some spirit of antagonism entered into Thurso, and when Maud came back he crossed over to the fire with the paper. But the news was of no importance, and by degrees he found himself attending less to the printed page, and more to the voice that sounded so pleasant and cheerful. Sometimes he found himself mentally ridiculing what was said, but yet he listened. It was arresting somehow, and whether it was only the personality of the speaker that arrested him, or what he said, he found himself, whether approving or disapproving, more and more absorbed in it.

Cochran spoke first, as he said he was going to do, about the apparently poisonous or sanative effects of drugs. These he maintained were not inherent in the drugs themselves, but in the belief of those who used them. But to use drugs for curative reasons was merely to encourage the false belief that they could in themselves cure; while, on the other hand, anyone who knew and fully believed that they could neither be health-giving nor destructive of health might, if he chose, eat deadly poison and be none the worse for it. But no one who held this belief would do so merely as a demonstration, to satisfy the idle curiosity of those who did not believe.

Then he passed on to bigger things, and as he spoke his voice grew deeper and more full of conviction, vibrating with earnestness.

“ But all this,” he said, “ though, of course, it is perfectly true, is only a detail that follows from the real and vital proposition. How error originally came in, I don’t pretend to say; what we have got to deal with to-day is that error is here, and that this error that ascribes to material things any real existence is a very common form of it. But this is, as I said, only a secondary matter; what really concerns us is not to know what does not exist, but to know what does. And one thing only exists, and that is God in all His manifestations. The Infinite Mind, the Divine Love,

is all that has any real being. But as light can be split up and some of it can appear in any of the hues of the rainbow, so that when you say, 'This is blue, this is red,' you are only speaking of a part of light, so when you say, 'This is unselfish, this is courageous, this is pure, this is lovely,' you are only speaking of one of the hues of God. It is good for us to contemplate any one of these, for each of them is lovely, but we must continually be pressing them all together, so that they all mingle with each other. And when that is done, when by the power of that little bit of the Infinite Mind that is within us we bring together all we know of Love and purity and unselfishness, then it is God whom we are contemplating. And whenever we contemplate Him like that there is no existence possible for sin and error or any imperfection. They all pass into nothingness, not because we will them to do so, or make any longer an assertion of their nothingness, but because their existence is inconceivable and impossible."

Thurso had dropped his paper and was listening, rebelliously, it is true, and antagonistically, but not without interest. Besides, what if it were true? Then indeed his antagonism and rebellion would be of the nature of some feeble, soft-bodied moth fluttering against an express train,

and hoping to stop it. There was something authoritative, too, about the words. It was not as when Scribes or Pharisees spoke.

Somehow, also (it was impossible not to feel this), there was the same authority not only about Cochran's words, but about his life. The things which he said were borne out by what he did, and it seemed as if it was not his temperament that determined his words and actions, but as if his words and actions, based on his belief, gave rise to an absolutely happy temperament. Big troubles, real anxieties, never came near him, but what to Thurso was almost more remarkable, it appeared that the innumerable little frets and inconveniences which are, he would have said, inseparable from the ordinary life of every day, were unable to touch him. Round him there seemed to be some atmosphere as of high mountain places in which these bacteria of worry could not live; nothing could dim or speck those happy, childlike eyes. A child's faith, as Maud had recognized last summer, shone there, and it was backed up and supported by the knowledge and experience of a man. Like all faith, it was instinctive, and every day of his life proved the truth of his instinct. And if either Thurso or Maud could have guessed how passionate and furious was the struggle going on all the time within him,

between the desire of his human nature and the absolutely fixed knowledge that he had no right to use this intimacy into which he was thrown with Maud, by this call to cure her brother, for his own ends they would have said that a miracle was going on before their eyes. The waves of desire, the longing for her, and, more dangerous than either, this knowledge that he loved her with all the best that was in him, continually beat upon him, but the abiding-place of his soul was absolutely unmoved by the surrounding tumult, and not for a moment was his serenity troubled. He often talked to her alone, and their talk would be of Thurso, or of this treatment under which he was markedly getting better, or it ranged more superficially over the topics of every day.

It was the third day after he had come to Long Island, and he and Maud were sitting together alone in the hour before evening closed in. The weather this morning had suddenly broken, and instead of the windless, sunny frost a south-easterly gale had set chimneys smoking, ice melting, and drove torrents of cold rain against the windows of the shuddering house. Maud at this moment was wiping her eyes, which the pungency of the wood-smoke had caused to overflow.

“ You were quite right,” she said, “ when you warned me not to have the fire lit here. And what makes it more annoying is that you don’t

weep also. I think we had better move into the other room, if you will. I can't stand it."

The other room was the billiard-room, where they did not often sit. It was free from smoke, however, and the fire prospered. Thurso had gone upstairs half an hour ago to write letters, and had not come back yet.

"He is so much better," said she, as she settled herself into a comfortable chair. "His recovery has been quite steady, too. Do you any longer fear a relapse?"

"Oh, I never feared it," said he, "in the sense that I ever thought it would baffle us. How could it? I only told you that when error has gone very deep you sometimes tap a sort of fresh reservoir of it, even when you seem to be coming to the end of it. Of course, that may not happen, but I have seen sudden attacks and onslaughts of a very violent kind, even when I thought that the cure was nearly complete."

"Four days only!" said Maud. "It is only four days since you really began to treat him. Surely he has made marvellous progress."

"Oh, he has."

"You have looked serene enough," said she.

"Why, I hope so. It's by serenity and complete conviction of the Omnipotence of All-Power that you fight error. If you abandon that, what are you to fight them with?"

He looked at her, and for the moment he felt that his love must betray itself, by word or gesture, in spite of himself. And surely there was some answering struggle going on in her. Was it only sympathy, only gratitude for what he had done, that shone in her eyes? But whatever it was, she had it in control also.

“ Won’t you tell me some of them? ” she said. “ I don’t think it is voicing error to tell the trouble to some one who believes. Perhaps I could help you to get rid of them. ”

He looked away.

“ Ah, the one that has been worst to-day is an absolutely private affair,” he said, “ which I can’t tell you yet anyhow. Then there is another—I have been letting myself be anxious about your brother. When I treated him this morning all sorts of doubts kept coming in. Half the time I was fighting them, instead of giving myself wholly to him. ”

“ But you never really doubted? ” said she. “ You never let them get hold of you? ”

“ No, but I was feeble. I was a muddy, choked channel for Divine Love to pass through. And I am now. I have to be continually dusting and cleaning myself. I have been having fears. ”

“ Specific ones? ”

“ Yes, of a violent accession of error, and for no reason, either. Because, if it did occur, I

should know quite well what to do. There couldn't be anything to fear. I guess he's been getting well so quickly and smoothly that I began to wonder whether it could be true, though I knew it was."

Maud got up.

"What would you do if he had a relapse?" she asked.

"I couldn't say now. But if it came it would surely be made quite clear to me how to demonstrate over it. One is never left in the lurch like that. It's only the Devil who plays his disciples false and gives them fits of remorse when they want to amuse themselves."

Walter Cochran drew his chair close to the fire with a little shudder of goose-flesh.

"I was awfully frightened by a storm once when I was a little chap," he said, "and it's left a sort of scar on my mind. I always have to demonstrate over a gale like this; I don't seem to be able to get used to them. Isn't that a confession of feebleness? But I don't think you would have guessed if I hadn't told you."

Maud looked at him with the divining instinct of her love.

"I dare say I shouldn't," she said. "But I am so sorry. It seems hard that you, who are continually giving your strength to others, should suffer for your generosity."

“ Oh, it’s not quite that,” he said. “ Whether I was treating Thurso or not, I should always have to tell myself that the gale and this uproar and air and sky are quite powerless to hurt me. There, listen to that! ”

An appalling blast swept by the house, and it seemed as if some door or window must have been opened, for the thick double curtain that communicated with the hall was lifted and a buffet of cold air came into the room where they sat, making the candles flicker. Cochran jumped up.

“ Something must be open,” he said. “ The wind has got right into the house.” The front door stood ajar. Thurso’s greatcoat was gone from the hall.

Thurso had crept forth noiselessly into the storm, pausing only to snatch up his greatcoat and a cap that chanced to be in the hall. It was the sight of the door that had given him the inspiration; the possibilities that lay beyond it had roused in a flash the erratic craving so nearly subdued of late.

Once outside he shook himself as does a dog coming out of water. There was a relief in being free from all surveillance, a joy in eluding everyone and in being for the moment at least his own master—or his drug’s unhampered slave. Bowing his head against the rain and sleet, he made for the village. Before he had walked a quarter

mile his thin evening shoes were soaked through, and he was chilled to the bone. But he gave little heed to such trifles. Ahead of him lay the rambling Long Island village and midway down its main street he recollected seeing the red and green lights of a pharmacy.

It was a matter of five minutes to find the place, and of another ten minutes to convince himself that not only was it closed for the night, but that no one slept on the premises.

The rumble of a train drawing into the near-by station gave him a new idea. It was but an hour's ride to New York. This must be the 9.30 up-train. A short run brought him panting to the station as the last carriage rolled out. Swinging himself aboard the rear platform, he collapsed in a heap in the "smoker."

To a passing guard he handed a five-dollar bill, not noting the amount of change received. As he was about to restore his pocketbook to the side pocket of his greatcoat, a paper fluttered from it to the floor. Thurso pounced on it and restored it carefully to the wallet. For it was his prescription, the carefully-copied "open sesame" that would at once procure him the drug he craved.

There had been little silver in the change given him by the guard. Barely thirty-five cents. This he dropped carelessly into the greatcoat's cash

pocket and leaned back, peering idly out into the misty blackness of the night.

In due time the train reached its terminus—the Long Island Station at Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn.

From the guard Thurso learned that he must there take an elevated or trolley car, which would carry him across Brooklyn Bridge and deposit him near the City Hall of New York.

As the Earl left the train a very sleepy, very drunk man who had sat across the aisle from him, rose to his feet, lurched forward and collided so violently with Thurso as almost to knock both of them off their legs. The drunkard apologized, mumbled profound regrets and reeled off in an opposite direction until the angle of a wall hid him from his late victim. Then he grew sober with marvelous rapidity, jumped aboard a passing trolley car and was whirled out of sight—Thurso's pocketbook nestling lovingly in his pocket.

Arrived at the New York terminus of Brooklyn Bridge, Thurso saw at once to his left, on the ground floor of a stately gold-domed building, the bright windows of an "all-night" pharmacy.

He entered and eagerly accosted the first clerk he saw.

"I wish this prescription filled," he began, "at once—at—at——"

His voice trailed away into a murmur of amaze. His hands were busy in every pocket of his great-coat. Then the outer garment was impatiently thrown open and his evening clothes subjected to the same rigid search.

“ I—I have mislaid the prescription,” he muttered, “ but if you will give me a pen and a blank I——”

He paused in growing alarm. For now he recalled that his missing pocketbook held not only the prescription but all his money with the exception of a little silver. This change, scattered through several pockets, he now drew out. There was less than a half dollar in all. Remembering the price he had been wont to pay in England for the drug, and noting the prosperous appearance of the shop, he knew, without asking, that his scanty funds were insufficient for his purpose.

With a mumbled apology he left the place. There surely must be less high-class chemist shops on less imposing thoroughfares, where, perhaps, his small quota of silver might suffice for a phial of laudanum.

With this idea he turned somewhat aimlessly to the right, and passing the Bridge Terminal walked hurriedly up a brightly-lighted but narrow street, above whose center ran the Elevated road tracks. And, as he progressed, his eyes shifting from right to left for the lights of a chemist shop,

he noted that his dilapidated evening attire, which had passed unremarked in the vicinity of City Hall Square, began to draw on him curious, even derisive looks from other pedestrians. These pedestrians, too, he observed, were of far different character from those whom he had seen near the terminal. A drunken sailor, a bevy of unshaven lads in jerseys and billycocks, a woman or two in cheap, dirty finery—these were the prevalent types. The shops, too, that lined the road wore a garish, unprepossessing look. One he singled out as a chemist's and walked in, choking at the odor of stale drugs and tobacco.

"I wish some laudanum," he began, addressing a greasy-looking man behind the counter.

"Where's your p'scription?" snapped the other, his eyes roving over the richly-dressed, unkempt figure of the Earl.

"I am a doctor," lied Thurso glibly. "Give me a blank and——"

"What's your name?"

"Heathcliffe—Giles Heathcliffe."

"Where d'y' live?"

"I beg pardon?"

"Where do you live?"

"On—on Twenty-third Street," replied Thurso, dimly recalling that thoroughfare by name from one of the morning papers.

"What number?"

Thurso paused. He remembered hearing of the great length of certain New York streets and jumped to the conclusion that the residence districts in each would probably be at some distance from the thoroughfare's beginning.

"Four—seventy—six!" he answered.

"East or West?"

"East. But my man, I wish——"

"My man," however, had vanished behind a screen. Reappearing a moment later with a big brown book between his hands, he thumbed the volume's pages, then remarked sententiously:

"No Heathcliffe in the Directory."

"I moved into town only last month. Probably——"

"What number East Twenty-third did you say you hung out at?"

With a wave of nervousness Thurso found that he could not remember the number he himself had named.

"I told you once!" he said stiffly. "Why do you——"

"Ya-as!" snarled the chemist, "an' you told me a lie! You said 476, East. An' the farthest number East is 444. See? Get out o' here!"

"But——" began Thurso, his craving rendering him oblivious even to the insult.

"Oh, I know your breed, you dirty dope-fiend! I sized you up the minute you come in. You're on

a spree an' you wanter fake a p'scription an' get the stuff from me, an' when you're found croaked from an overdose there's the bottle with my label on it in your jeans. An' me with only a fake p'scription to flash when the District Attorney asks me questions! G'tout o' here, I tell you, 'fore I send for a cop!"

"But I can pay well!" intervened Thurso, "I——"

An evil light sprang into the shopkeeper's little eyes. He leaned across the counter.

"Not so loud!" he muttered. "Why didn't you say so before? The bottle needn't have no label. Now for a tenner——"

Now, in English slang, a "tanner" is a sixpence. The shopman's drawling pronunciation of the Yankee abbreviation for \$10 struck familiarly on Thurso's ears, even as the latter, at sudden memory of his lost notes, was repenting his hasty offer of a bribe. But if it were but a question of a "tanner——"

In glad relief he tossed a twenty-five cent piece across the counter.

"Keep the change!" he said loftily, "and please be quick with the laudanum."

Really, he had been clever to seek this very cheap street. He chuckled at his own perspicacity. But the grin died on his lips as he met the chemist's glance.

“ Wot’s this for? ” roared the latter, belligerently.

“ It’s your ‘ tanner,’ and——”

“ I said a ‘ tenner,’ you four flush! Get out of here, I tell you, or——”

This time Thurso obeyed. He wondered dully why he felt no desire to thrash the insolent little cur. But his one desire crowded out all lesser emotions. He wandered on, passing under an Elevated station and searching for another shop with red and green lights.

He accosted a youth with an undershot jaw and banged hair.

“ Can you direct me to a chemist’s? ” he asked.

“ A which? ”

“ A chemist’s.”

“ Dey don’t teach chemistry on de Bowery. Youse must ‘a’ fell outer your club into de river. You don’t belong on dis street no more’n a pair o’ yeller shoes at a dance.”

“ But I——”

“ Aw, fade away! ”

A group of idlers had gathered, drawn by the unwonted spectacle of the wet, bewildered man in evening clothes in such a locality. At the undershot youth’s brilliant repartee they laughed loudly. This was too much for Thurso. It penetrated his concentration of mind and woke in him a sort of blind fury.

The youth went rolling into the muddy gutter from a well-planted blow on the jaw. But before Thurso could bring his clinched left fist back to his side a half dozen toughs—friends and fellow loafers of the undershot lad—were upon him. Luckily he was near enough to a wall to find a “back” for himself as they reached him.

But even this temporary advantage availed little. For these were not the sort of men to fight fairly. Not an underhand or murderous ruse of street conflict but they knew by rote. Moreover, at the fall of one of their number, the world-old rage of proletariat against patrician flared up.

They pressed closely on their strange foe, waiting the signal for the concerted rush that should wipe out their comrade’s grievance and cause one more of many mysterious “assault cases” for Gouverneur Hospital. A rush, a drawing back, and a quick scamper to lane and byway, leaving a huddled, inert heap on the pavement to await the ambulance’s arrival. It would be but the matter of a moment. But the rush was never made.

A girl, tall, slender, quietly dressed, slipped through the tense half circle and, taking her place at Thurso’s side, faced the toughs.

“Gee! It’s Miss Alstyne from th’ Settlement!” grumbled the ringleader. “She’s always buttin’ in.”

But the rush paused, while the girl was speaking in a calm, well-modulated voice.

“ Patrick Heeney, ‘ Red ’ Grier, ‘ Spike ’ Jennings, Frank Fogarty,” she enumerated, glancing from face to face, “ yes, I think I know most of you by name. This won’t be one more of your ‘ mysterious attack ’ cases. For I’ll see that every one of your names goes at once to Captain Hodgins if you lay a finger on this gentleman. Now, go! ”

One by one—and with audible comments that sent the blood hotly to the girl’s pallid face—the toughs slouched away, until, except for the more distant knots of non-combatant spectators, the fair rescuer and Thurso stood alone.

She turned then and spoke to him for the first time.

“ I happened to be passing,” she said, then stopped. For Thurso was leaning in a state of semi-unconsciousness against the wall; swaying awkwardly forward and back, his head hanging limp on his chest. The excitement, danger and quick action, following on his chilled and overwrought state, had induced the reaction of utter collapse so common in drug cases.

“ Are you hurt? ” she asked in quick sympathy.

“ No. I think not,” he replied dazedly, seeking to pull himself together, “ I—I——”

“ Don’t try to talk. Are you strong enough to

come to the Settlement? It is just around the corner. Lean on me. So! Now if you feel faint again we'll stop."

Slowly, the Earl shuffling weakly at her side, the Settlement Worker proceeded through the rain until they reached a building whose door lamps flashed hospitable welcome. Up the low, broad steps the two passed and along a hallway.

"Come in here," said the girl, guiding Thurso into a white-walled room whose walls were lined with shelves. "This is our dispensary. Sit down and I'll bring the doctor to you in a moment. He's somewhere about the House."

She flitted out, leaving him. Slowly his senses crept back toward normality. Then a sight met his eye that banished in a moment all numbness of brain and body. The walls were lined with shelves; the shelves with bottles. Upon the table, where she had flung her gloves, lay the girl's purse.

Thurso was on his feet, thrilling with excitement, mad with distorted longings and plans. He ran his finger along the various rows of phials. At last with a little gurgle of animal joy he found the bottle he sought. In another instant it was loosely wrapped in a bit of newspaper and thrust into his greatcoat pocket.

And now to escape. But at memory of his recent experiences in the streets of New York, he

shuddered. No. He must get back to Long Island. There might be a midnight or one o'clock train. He could creep unseen into the house. Maud would have gone to bed and he would have the whole night to himself. Best touch none of the glorious drug till then; so thus to get its fullest charm. The joy of an epicure swept over him in anticipation. It would not do to taste it until safe at home. He needed all his wits just now. He must not befog them.

Then came a thrill of disappointment. Without money, how was he to reach the sanctuary of his own room? How could——

Once more his gaze rested on the purse. It was all so absurdly easy.

“I suppose,” he thought with impersonal calm, “I suppose this is about the lowest depths to which a white man can fall.”

He extracted a five-dollar bill from the little reticule, then started for the door. On the threshold he turned back. With a quick gesture he ripped the two costly black pearl studs from his shirt front, dropped them into the purse, closed it and noiselessly slipped out of the dispensary and so to the street.

* * * * *

Cochran and Maud had spent the longest, dreariest evening either had known. They had speedily ascertained that Thurso was indeed out

of the house. Maud had suggested that they send a messenger to the village; but this Cochran had vetoed.

“He will come back,” he said quietly. His hope and faith were still strong. Yet, at the very moment of apparent victory, this setback for the time almost unnerved him.

As for Maud, her struggle to fight back the bitter tears of humiliation precluded all speech. And thus, for hours, they sat silent, comfortless, distrait.

Midnight was long passed when a faint click at the front door brought Cochran to his feet.

Maud rose with him, and they went out into the hall. In the corner near the door was standing Thurso, the rain dripping from him, just taking off his coat, with infinite precaution, as if not to be overheard.

“Why, Thurso,” said Maud, “what have you been doing? Where have you been?”

He looked from one to the other, and spoke in a voice that did not sound natural.

“I have been out—on business,” he said, “and then—and then——”

Maud looked at Cochran. All thought of the gale, and whatever else it was that had been troubling him, had passed from him. His eyes were alight, his face was vital and alert again.

“ Yes, and what else? ” he said. “ There’s a packet in your coat; I can see it.”

Maud made one exclamation of dismay.

“ Oh, Thurso! ” she exclaimed.

Thurso’s hand tightened on it.

“ Yes, I can’t help it,” he said. “ Besides, I am much better, am I not? I must break myself of it by degrees.”

Then he turned to Cochran.

“ Ah, do let me have it just this once! ” he cried. “ I’ve been without it a week. I swear to you it shall be a fortnight before I take it again. Don’t send me to sleep this time.”

“ Let’s have a look at the bottle.”

A cunning look came into Thurso’s face.

“ Oh, I think not,” he said. “ You might forget to give it me back. Look here, I’m going to take it. I’m—I’m awfully grateful to you for all you’ve done, but this once you shan’t stop me.”

“ I never stopped you before,” said Cochran. “ And——”

He shut his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again they were full of serene confidence.

“ And I’m not going to stop you now,” he said. “ But you opium-eaters are so stingy with your stuff. You never treat another fellow. And I want some of that. Let’s have a jolly good drink together. Haven’t you got enough for us both? ”

Thurso gave a little cackle of delight. His eyes, too, like Cochran's, were very bright, but they were bright with thirst. His mouth, too, so watered that he could hardly swallow quick enough to keep the saliva down.

"Why, of course," he said. "I don't know what you mean by it, but I'll do anything if you'll let me take it and not stop me."

"Thanks ever so much," said Cochran. "I've often wanted the opportunity to take it. Why, I've got quite a craving already."

Maud was looking from one to the other, utterly puzzled.

"Mr. Cochran, what are you going to do?" she said. "Are you mad?"

He smiled at her.

"I am only going to do just that which Infinite Power has bidden me," he said. "You mustn't be afraid, nor must you doubt it."

CHAPTER X

THEY passed all three of them into the billiard-room again. Outside the wild hurly-burly of the storm still screamed and yelled round them, but Cochran now was utterly unconscious of it. The clear command had come to his soul; he knew that what he was going to do was right, and he had no fear whatever of the consequences. Consequences? The only consequences that there could be, and that there must be, were a demonstration convincing and conclusive as to the truth of all he taught and believed. As he had said to Maud a few hours ago, he did not then know what he should do if Thurso had a relapse, but he knew now. He was perfectly certain he was doing right.

He rang the bell as soon as he got in.

“ We want some glasses, I suppose, don't we? ” he said.

Thurso looked at him furtively.

“ But the servants mustn't know,” he said.

“ Why not? I should like everybody to know. Bring a couple of glasses, please,” he said to the man. “ Is there anything else? ” he asked Thurso.

“ I take a little hot water and sugar with it,” he said.

“ Hot water and sugar, please,” said Cochran. Then a sudden distrust came into Thurso’s mind.

“ You are not going to cheat me? ” he said.

Cochran felt one moment of vast pity for him. Ever since they had gone out and found him crouching in the corner of the hall he had felt that it was a different personality from the Thurso of the last three days whom they found there. It was as if he was possessed—he was furtive and suspicious, nothing remained of him but Thirst, thirst for that drug that had already dragged him so near to ruin and death, that expunged from his mind all sense of honor, all the moral code by which men were bound, all sense that other people were bound by it.

“ No, I’m not going to cheat you,” he said. “ I suppose you forged the prescription again? ”

Thurso laughed.

The man had brought the glasses, hot water and sugar by this time, and Thurso eagerly undid the bottle. What exactly was going to happen Maud did not know, but she trusted Cochran, and utterly she trusted the Power which he felt sure was bidding him do this.

Thurso poured some half of the bottle into his own glass and passed it across to Cochran.

"I wouldn't take much if I were you," he said, pouring hot water into his glass, and stirring up a lump of sugar in it.

"Greedy fellow!" said Cochran. "And is that your dose? Why it's half the bottle."

Again Thurso giggled.

"I know. It's a regular big dose this time," he said. "I never took quite so much before."

Once more a moment of weakness came to Maud.

"Oh, Thurso, Thurso!" she said imploringly. But he did not seem to notice her.

"And then I shall sit by the fire," he went on, "and have six hours of Paradise. I shouldn't take more than a teaspoonful if I were you," he said to Cochran; "that's what I began with."

"Ah, then see here," said Cochran.

He poured the rest of the bottle into his glass. It was rather more than Thurso had taken. Then, without troubling about hot water or sugar, he drank it off. Thurso had just raised his glass to his mouth, but he put it down.

"Why, it will kill you, it will kill you!" he screamed. "What have you done? You must take an emetic at once. You'll be dead in a couple of hours. Maud, don't sit there," he cried. "Send for the doctor. Send for somebody, quick!"

But Maud did not move. Cochran looked at

her once, and she smiled at him, and he seemed satisfied, as if he had been waiting for that—just her assurance of confidence that the smile gave. Then he turned to Thurso.

“ Now, I haven’t interfered with you,” he said, “ and you are not going to interfere with me. What I have drunk will not have the smallest effect on me, because I have done it to show you, when I could think of nothing else that would show you, how you have been a slave to that which had no real power or effect of any kind. It has been your intention, your false belief, your self-indulgence that has brought you to this. And now, at last, perhaps you will see the unreality of it. But you have made it through error so real to yourself that you have become what you are to-day. Just think for a moment what you were a year ago, and think what you are now.”

Thurso walked up and down the room, waving his hands, gesticulating in despair during this. Once he had tried to go to the door, but Cochran had stepped in front of it, and stood there.

“ Aren’t you going to drink that? ” said Cochran at length, pointing to the glass Thurso had set down untasted.

Thurso again did not seem to hear him.

“ Oh, I implore you,” he cried, “ I implore you to go and take an emetic, and be quick about it. You have taken a fatal dose. You will be dead

in a couple of hours. And it's my fault. You did it to convince me. Oh, if you'll only go, I will swear to you never to touch it again. As for that——"

He took his own glass and flung it just as it was into the fire, where, with hissing and a huge cloud of steam and blackening of the wood logs, it passed away.

"There, will that convince you?" he cried. "And just when I was worked up for it, wanting it as I have never wanted it before. Oh, I implore you, go! If you don't, I shall have killed you, and you have helped me so much, so much."

He flung himself down on a sofa, in a paroxysm of despair, and Maud, though she could not trust herself to speak, else she would have burst into floods of uncontrollable weeping, thanked God for it, telling herself she was not afraid—she would not be afraid. For she believed that Cochran had done right. God would not play him false, while, as for Thurso, at last he was broken. A thousand times had he fallen and been sorry, and vowed to amend, but he had never been broken like this. This was the utter abandonment, the real repentance. If, as Cochran had said, there was still a reservoir of error, she could not doubt but that its banks were broken now: it was coming out from him in torrents.

But then Cochran moved from the door, still

smiling, still perfectly serene, and sat down by Thurso, as he half lay on the sofa, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

“ I’m glad it has taken you like this, my dear fellow,” he said, “ and I’m sorrier than I can say for all the anguish you are now suffering. But I saw no other way of convincing you. I’m sorry for the pain you feel now, because it is quite unnecessary. Your fears for me are as false as was your desire for that stuff, which I thought tasted abominable. But I’m infinitely glad for it in another way, because I think you will see now. All that has been doing you so much good these last four days hasn’t yet been real to you. But I think it will be real now.”

“ Oh, it’s not too late yet,” cried Thurso. “ But go at once! ”

“ And show you I don’t believe a word of all that I have ever said to you and Lady Maud? ” he answered. “ You can’t seriously invite me to be such a hypocrite as that. Why, anyone of the least spirit would sooner die, as I fancy you still think I shall, than do that.”

Thurso laid an agonized hand on his knee.

“ But have you ever done anything of the sort before? ” he asked. “ For Heaven’s sake, tell me you have, and add that it came all right.”

Cochran laughed.

“ Well, no, I haven’t,” he said; “ and this is

the opportunity I have long wanted. Now, when is this bad-tasting stuff supposed to take effect? ”

Again Thurso beat the air with his hands.

“ Oh, it’s my fault, it’s my fault! ” he moaned.

“ Maud, can’t you persuade him? ”

“ No, dear Thurso,” said she rather huskily.

“ At least, I shan’t try.”

They sat in silence after this for a minute. Then Thurso got quickly up and went out. Maud’s eyes sought Cochran.

“ Is it all right to leave him? ” she asked.

“ Oh, yes. He may have gone for a doctor; he may have gone, well, to break down all by himself. But he will not harm himself.”

“ You are sure? ” she asked.

“ Absolutely. Why, Divine Love is pouring in on all sides to him. He’s in safe hands.”

He looked at her for a long moment.

“ He is cured, you know,” he said. “ And there’s no more reason for me to stop here. I think I’ll go back to town to-night.”

Then Maud’s lip quivered and her eyes brimmed over.

“ God bless you! ” she said.

She took both his hands in hers for a moment, and then looked at him again.

“ You mustn’t think of going up to-night or to-morrow,” she said. “ You say your work is

over. But can't you stay a day or two yet with your friends? "

" Is it as your friend that I stay here? " he said slowly.

" Yes; mine and Thurso's."

" Your friendship has meant much to me," he said in an earnest tone. He, who had braved death that he might save Thurso from the thrall of opium, felt a strange cowardice choking his every utterance. His heart—his whole being—clamored madly for speech. Yet his lips in miserable fear held back the burning words that beat against them for egress.

Maud felt, without divining, the constraint in his tone. His words were pitiably formal. The speech was a dash of cold spray in her face.

" We can never thank you as we should," she replied, and her own voice was unconsciously colder.

" I have told you it was not I who should receive your gratitude. I was but the instrument. And now, I beg you won't think me ungracious when I say I think it is best that I should not prolong my stay."

The unwonted coldness in her voice had cut him cruelly and, lover-like, he had lost no time in misconstruing it.

" We would not dream of urging you against your will," she answered. " Of course there must

be many interests you have sacrificed to come here and——”

“ No, no ! ” he protested. “ I have only one interest in all this whole world. Only one hope, one aim, one longing. And that lies here.”

She averted her head to hide the hot flush that swept face and brow. She sought to speak, but her voice deserted her. And even so, in the flood tide of his declaration did Walter Cochran’s courage depart. For, in his crass ignorance of love and the ways of women he read unwillingness to listen, perhaps even aversion, in her sudden turning away from him. Faith and ordinarily firm nerves are but sorry allies when a tyro at love seeks to propose. In dire fear lest he be thought to press a suit that was patently unwelcome, he added awkwardly :

“ My interest in your brother’s case has been greater than you realize. I——”

A little gasp interrupted him. The girl, her cheeks still flaming, but her eyes no longer averted, faced him.

“ I think I understand,” she said unsteadily, “ and I appreciate your interest in—my brother. He and I will always remember your friendship. It’s pleasant, isn’t it,” she went on with a forced laugh, “ to be able to form a jolly, frank friendship with a man? It’s more unusual than most people suppose. I am very fortunate.”

She was carrying it off well. But not well enough to have deceived any less confused mortal than Walter Cochran. Her laugh and careless words grated on his senses like a file.

"I think I will have just time to pack for the three o'clock train," he said. "You will excuse me if I go up now and begin?"

"Of course. If you really must leave us so soon," she responded with delightful formality, and turned to arrange some flowers at a table near by.

Her back was turned to him. He stood dumbly watching her as she gathered up the heap of flowers and placed them one by one in a Cloisonné bowl. She knew he was still there and in artless abandon began to hum

*"Parlate-le de l'amor,
Cari fior'."*

Not being musical, Walter wholly missed the ironic suggestiveness of the song. But he noted the white slenderness of her fingers amid the crimson glory of the roses, and the winter sunlight's play upon her soft hair. She thrust one rose through her braids as she sang and worked, apparently ignorant of his continued presence in the room. Her whole course of action suggested *opera bouffe*. But it was that or tears; and she bravely chose the former alternative.

The rose, top heavy and weak of stem, fell from her hair to the floor behind her. Cochran knelt to pick it up. It was warm, glowing, redolent of her sweet personality. Instinctively, her back being turned, he crushed the flower to his lips.

Then her singing ceased—abruptly, even inartistically.

“You are not going away!” she announced with pretty decision.

“W—why not?” he asked in bewilderment, scrambling to his feet. She had not turned.

“Because,” she replied demurely, “because I happened to be looking into this mirror just now. I couldn’t see myself. It was at the wrong angle. But—but I could see *you*.”

Now blessed be the man who invented mirrors! And out upon him who prates against them as useless promoters of vanity!

Cochran stared, stupid, dumfounded, for a whole second. Then he regained his sanity.

“I love you!” he said.

That was all. Gravely, simply, like two little children, they kissed each other, while, above them, ungratefully forgotten, the tiny wall mirror blazed back the thousand dazzling rays of the winter sun.

* * * * *

Walter Cochran’s suggestion had been quite right, and, half an hour later, Thurso came back drenched with the storm, for he had put on neither

hat nor coat, with the doctor from Port Washington. A minute later a highly-affronted physician left again, wondering if it was a form of English humor to drag a man out on a night like this, saying that Mr. Cochran had inadvertently taken a huge dose of laudanum, only to find Mr. Cochran, who, if he had done so, would certainly by now have lost consciousness, looking rather annoyed at the interruption, but otherwise brilliantly well. But a glance at the face of his companion was sufficient to account for his annoyance.

CHAPTER XI

LILY THURSO was returning home to Thurso House the next afternoon about four o'clock. She had been lunching out, and people were coming to dinner, but she had a good deal to do before that, and a good deal to think about. Also, there would be for her a telegram from Maud, who cabled to her every day, and she was anxious to see what it was.

Ever since the departure of her husband and sister-in-law to America her hands had been very full, and she had devoted more time than usual to purely social duties. For she knew quite well that London had talked a good deal about Thurso's "illness," in that particular tone which means that in public and to her it was referred to as "illness" in the abstract, but when two or three only were gathered together it was discussed far more in detail. With her unerring tact, therefore, and knowledge of the world, she knew that the more she was seen about, the more she entered into the life of the place, the less public the scandal was likely to be. With all its faults, the world respects bravery and the power of facing things (and certainly she had faced them

magnificently), with the result that already the world had begun to think that it was rather a "shame" to talk about Thurso when Lily was so gallant. It would very much have liked to know why she had not gone with him, but still, on the whole, it was a "shame" to talk. And since the memory of the world resides in its tongue, it follows that it soon forgets when it ceases to talk. It was understood, however, that Thurso's case was hopeless.

Lily had thought so, too. He had, as has been seen, refused to say good-by to her, but from her window she had seen his face as he got into the carriage which took him and Maud to the station, and it seemed to her that death was already there, so that she had not, as a matter of fact, expected that he would reach America alive. During those days she had thought more deeply and earnestly about it all than she had ever thought before in her very busy but unemotional life, and with her whole heart she had forgiven him for the sufferings and indignities he had brought on her during these last six months. Whether he would ever read her letter or not, she did not know, but some five days after their departure she had written to him, quite shortly, but quite sincerely, bidding him, if any thought of pain or sorrow came to him for the pain he had brought on her, to dismiss it as absolutely

as she had dismissed any wrong he had done her, and devote himself entirely to getting well. It had cost her a great deal to do that, for just as she was very slow to take offence, so she was naturally very slow to forgive, and the events of these last six months, with that crowning indignity, had bitten very deeply into her.

Then had come the telegram from Maud on their arrival at New York. It told her that he had taken laudanum again, that he had forged the name of the doctor, but that he had, after one dose, allowed her to throw the bottle away. His general health, it said, was rather improved. Three more telegrams reporting the events of three more days had come since then, each recording improvement, and it was this fourth that she was expecting to find now on her return.

But, as she drove now through the streets, where the shops were gay for Christmas purchasers, she knew that this was not half the stress of the emotional conflict that was going on in her. Matters, as was inevitable, had come to a crisis between her and Rudolf Villars, and two days ago he had declared to her the steadfast and passionate devotion that he had always felt for her. But he had refused to go on any longer on this present footing of friendship. Should she now definitely reject his devotion, he would not see her again, except as was necessary in the casual meetings,

when the world brought them together. And she had promised to give him his answer this evening,

She had really no idea at this moment of what it would be. Months ago she had determined that she would not herself break that moral law, though she did not really believe in it. But since then much had happened; ruin and degradation had come to her husband; he had offered her the greatest insult that from the point of this moral law a wife can be offered, and, what was a far more vital and determining fact in her choice, she knew now that she loved Rudolf Villars, and with an intensity that she believed equal to his. Could the moral law that tied her to an opium-drenched wreck sever her from this other man?

And then suddenly she remembered the letter she had written to Thurso. She had told him that the past was utterly blotted out. Had she only said that because she meant to console herself in the future? Or had she said it because she did not believe he would live? No, she had said it because the best part of her meant it. But just now that best part seemed dwindled to a mere pin's head in her consciousness. Love and life and desire were trumpets and decorations to her; that little gray tattered flag of honor was scarcely visible among the miles of bunting and the blare of the welcome that would be hers if she said one word to her lover.

Her victoria had already stopped at her door, and the footman had turned back the sable rug to let her get out, but she sat for a moment quite still, for the thought had hit her like a blow. Till it came she had not known how nearly she had decided; now that it had come she could not for the moment estimate how it would affect her decision. Only for the moment it was stunning. She had told her husband that the past was wiped out—all that he had said or done which had been unjust and insulting to her she had cancelled, annihilated as far as it concerned her. Was she then going to make a fresh past on her own account? To give him an opportunity to be as generous as she? There was a sort of ironical fitness about this that she could not help being amused at, though it concerned things as vital as sin and forgiveness.

And as she got out of her victoria and entered the house she endorsed that to herself. She would have written that letter over again to Thurso at this moment, and have expressed it even more strongly. All that was implied in it, too, she would have endorsed. But in spite of the telegrams of these last three days she did not really believe that he would live.

There was some dozen of letters for her on the table in the hall, and a telegram lay a little

apart. As she picked all these up she spoke to her major-domo.

“ I shall be in to anybody until six,” she said. “ If Count Villars calls after that, I shall be in to him.”

“ Yes, my lady.”

There were two little hats and two little coats hanging up in the hall. She looked at these for a moment, feeling that they ought to convey something to her, but she did not quite know what. Then she remembered that her two sons were due at home to-day.

“ Lord Stratton and Lord Henry have come? ” she asked.

“ Yes, my lady; they arrived an hour ago.”

Again she paused a moment.

“ Let them know that I have come in. They can come and have their tea with me in the drawing-room in ten minutes. And a boiled egg for them each,” she added.

She frowned to herself, still not going up that staircase that had been the hay-field of wild flowers to her but last summer, wondering at her indecision. Then she spoke again.

“ I am in to no one but Count Villars,” she said. “ But tell the young gentlemen to come down and have tea with me.”

The past was dead, she had said that, but there was something in the past, these two boys whom

she had never found particularly interesting, which the death of the past, in the sense that she had promised it to her husband, made more alive. It was the wretchedness and alienation of the past that she had meant and implied should be dead; she willed it more surely by caring for that which was truly vital in it, by neglecting no longer that and those whom she had neglected too much. She was not sorry for her neglect of them in the past; but, if Thurso lived, the letter she had written to him had to be fulfilled to its utmost. Even now she recognized that the two children could help to stab the bitterness of the past to death. She was their mother, and though for all these years she had forgotten the joy, just as she had forgotten the pains of maternity, it was not wholly dead. Yet Villars. Would it perhaps be better not to see him, then? She could hardly do that. She had promised him her answer, and she never shirked a promise. Yet, even now, she did not know what her answer would be. She was doing no more than adding up her accounts, seeing what she owed to everybody all round.

All this passed very quickly as she went upstairs. Then she paused underneath the electric light at the top and opened the telegram. She looked first at the end of it, as is natural in reading a telegram, and expecting to see Maud's name. But it was signed "Thurso."

Then she read it:

“ I am cured, and am perfectly well. I humbly entreat your pardon, though your letter so generously grants it. Shall I come back, or could you possibly come out here? I must see you as soon as possible.

THURSO.”

She read it once, she read it once more, as if to be sure of the sense of this incredible thing. Could it be a hoax? If so, who could have played so grim a joke? She looked at the hour at which it was sent off, the hour at which it had arrived. Then she read it once more, and folded it up.

“ But it is incredible,” she said to herself. “ Miracles don’t happen.”

She passed into the drawing-room, looking consciously round at the tapestries, the brocaded furniture, the warm, mellow light of the shaded lamps, as if to assure herself that this was not a dream. She opened a letter or two, but they were quite ordinary and commonplace; there was an invitation or two to dinner, there were a few acceptances of her invitations, and all were signed with familiar names. Already, too, a footman was laying the table for tea—he had drawn two high chairs to the table and had put a plate and an egg-cup opposite each. Everything except this telegram indicated that the world was going on

in its normal manner. She had ordered a boiled egg, as a treat, for each of the children. There were the egg-cups.

The children? Whose? Hers and Thurso's.

Thurso was cured, so he said. He besought her forgiveness. Her children were coming down to tea with her. She expected Villars. That was enough to think about for the few minutes that would elapse before the children came.

How *bourgeois* all situations were when they actually occurred! But how deadly, when it actually occurred, was the struggle between that old fetich called Morality or Duty and—and—well, anything else. She had really no idea what this fetich was like—she had been pure because she had been untempted. Now the fetich was revealing its face. But all these years she had been kind; she had been generous; she had had the instinct for helping what or whoever suffered. That, too, helped to mould the face of the fetiches that were unveiling themselves.

The message that the children were to come down to tea had not been productive, up above, of immediate rapture. Stratton, aged eleven, had said "Oh, bother!" and Henry, aged ten, had said "Shall we have to stop long?" Their mother was a radiant but rather terrifying vision to them. She was usually doing something else,

and mustn't be interrupted. That summed up their knowledge of her.

Still, down below there was nervousness also. But she remembered some curious cards that had once produced shouts of laughter, when the children were playing with their father. They concerned Mr. Bones, the butcher, and other legendary people. She remembered the day, too, a wet afternoon at the end of July, when they had played with them, and went to a cupboard in the drawing-room where cards could usually be found, and discovered these images of joy. The children were going to have eggs also at their tea. That was a treat, too.

They came in soon after, rather shy, and very anxious to "behave." But insensibly, with the instinct of children, they saw that "behavior" was really not necessary. That radiant vision begged a spoonful of Henry's egg, and asked Stratton if he could not spare one corner of the delicious toast which he had buttered for himself.

There was good news also. Father was away—and some nameless dagger pierced her as she realized that this was the first they had heard of it—and he had been ill. But he was ever so much better, quite well in fact, and soon he was coming back home, or else mamma was going out to see him—yes, to America, miles away. What ocean? Atlantic, of course.

Soon there was no thought in the children's minds of how long it was necessary to stop. The wonderful cards were produced, and they all sat on the hearth-rug, and mamma was too stupid for anything—"Why, she had the whole suit of Mr. Bones the butcher in her hand and never declared it." So Henry got Mr. Bones the butcher, and with devilish ingenuity retained it, instead of passing it on to Stratton, who might, without thinking, have passed it back to mamma, who might then have seen how silly she had been.

The game was deliriously exciting when an interruption came, and Stratton again said, "Oh, bother!" But mamma did not get up from the hearth-rug. The children, however, were told to do so.

"Get up, boys," she said, "and shake hands with Count Villars. But don't let me see your cards. I am going to win. How are you, Villars? The boys are just home from school. This is Stratton; this is Henry. Do give yourself some tea, and be kind, and let us finish our game."

Lily Thurso again proved herself a perfect idiot, and Henry threw down his cards with a shriek.

"All the Snips, the tailors!" he cried.

"Oh, you little beast," cried his mother, "and I have all the Bones but one! Now, go upstairs, darlings, and take the cards with you, if you like."

"And is papa coming home?" asked Stratton.

"I don't know yet. Off you go!"

"And are we to say good-by to him?" asked Henry in a whisper.

"Yes, of course. You must always say good-by when you leave the room."

There was silence for a moment after the boys had gone. Lily broke it.

"I have just had a telegram from America," she said. "Thurso sent it. He is better. He says he is cured. He asks me if I will go there, or if he shall come back."

She was still sitting on the hearth-rug where she had played with her sons. But here she got up.

"I think I shall go to him," she said, and she raised her eyes to his.

And then the Adelphi melodrama broke down—it began to be played on utterly unconventional lines. He should have been the villain of the piece, and she the guttural heroine. But he was not a villain any more than she was a heroine.

"I think I have always loved you," she said. "But I can't be mean—not intentionally, at least. Thurso appeared to be beyond human power. But he says he is well. He asks my forgiveness—he had it already, but he asks it. So I must go to him."

He stirred his tea in a perfectly commonplace way, and drank it.

“ Say something,” she said.

Then he got up.

“ I say you are doing right,” he answered. “ I came to ask for your answer, and I have got it.”

He moved towards the door. Then he came back quickly.

“ God bless you! ” he said.

Two days afterwards Lily came up on to the deck of the White Star liner on which she was travelling. The sun had just sunk, but in the East the crescent moon was rising, and in the West, whither she was journeying, there was still the afterglow of sunset. She was leaving the East where the moon was, but she was moving towards that other light. And she was content that it should be so—she who had schemed so much and planned so much would not have had it different. The West, too, where she was going, had meant so much for Thurso—it had meant all for him. It was far easier to weigh the moon than to weigh the veiled light of the sunken sun. She had renounced, blindly, it might be. If for her, too, in the West, in the afterglow——

THE END.

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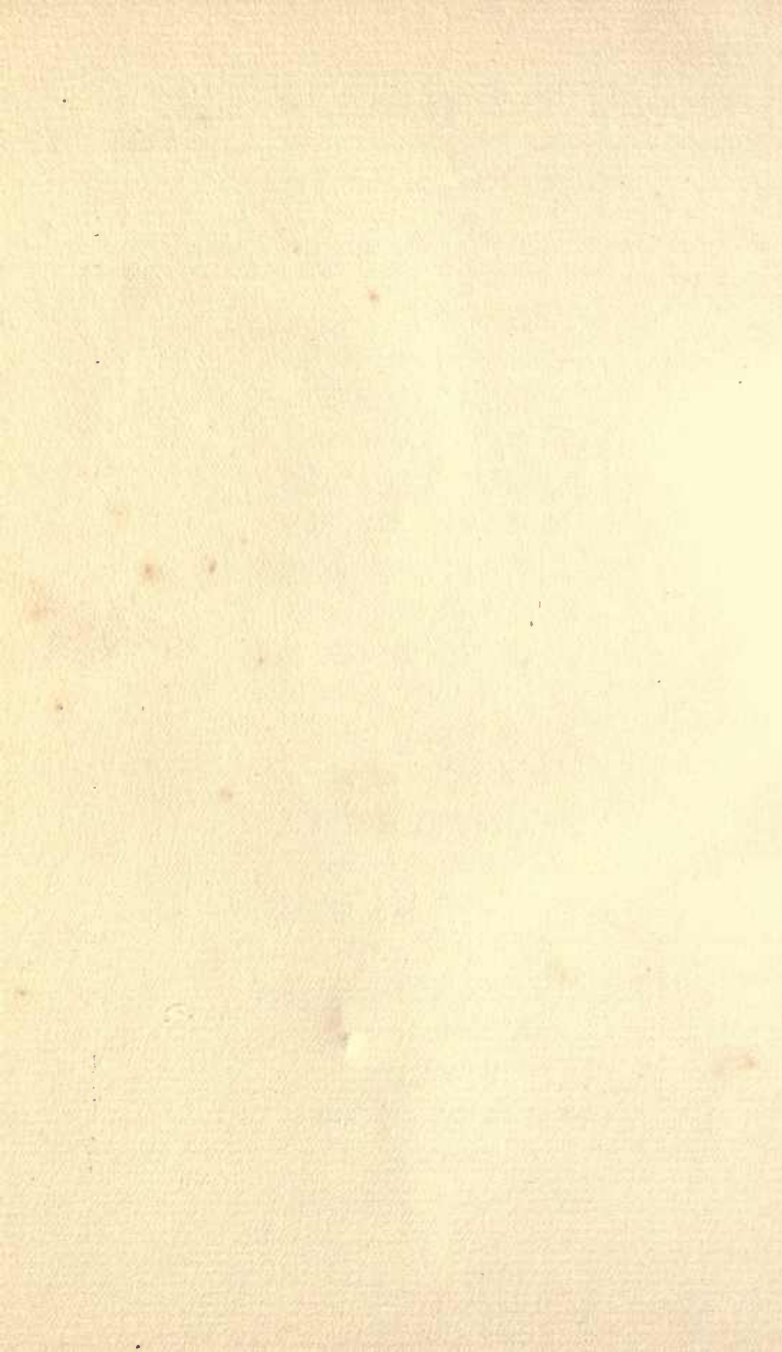
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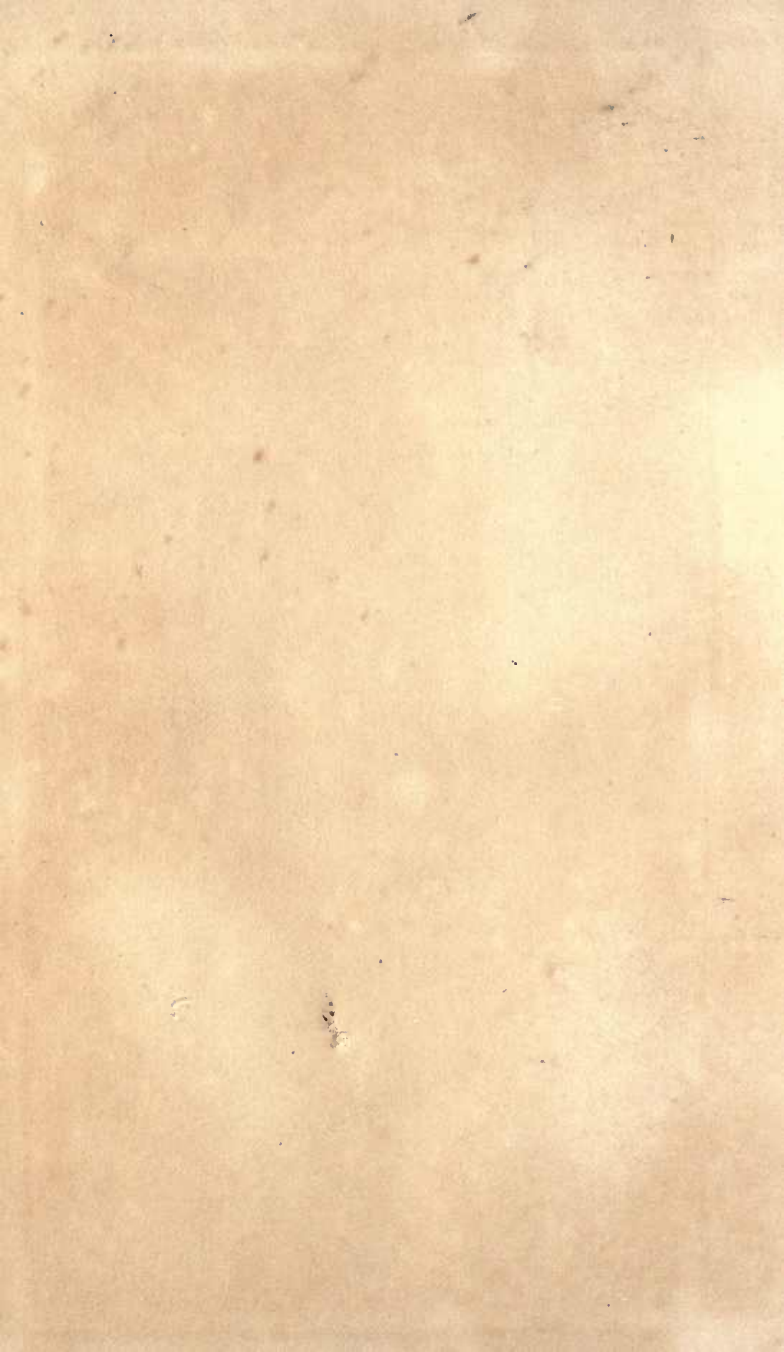
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